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THE Easiest Way

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

Eugene Walter

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THE Easiest Way

An American play concerning
a peculiar phase of New York
life, in Four Acts and Four
Scenes - - - -

BY

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CHARACTERS of the PLAY

John Madison

Willard Brocton

Jim Weston

Laura Murdock

Elfie St. Clair

Annie

Synopsis

Act I.

Mrs. William's ranch house or country home, perched on the side of Ute Pass, near Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Time: Late in an August afternoon.

Act II.

Laura Murdock's furnished room, second story back, New York.

Time: Six months later.

Act III.

Laura Murdock's apartments in an expensive hotel.

Time: Two months later. In the morning.

Act IV.

The same as Act. III.

Time: The same afternoon.



Description of Characters

LAURA MURDOCK, twenty-five years of age, is a type that is not uncommon to the theatrical life in New York, and which has grown in importance in relation to the profession since the business of giving public entertainments has been so utterly reduced to a commercial basis.

At an early age she came from Australia and settled in San Francisco. She was gifted with considerable beauty and an aptitude for theatrical accomplishment that soon raised her in a position of more or less importance in a local stock company playing in that city.

A woman of intense superficial emotions; her imagination is without any enduring depths, but for the passing time she can place herself in an attitude of great affection and devotion. Sensually, the woman had marked characteristics, and with the flattery that surrounded her she soon became a favorite in the select circles who made such places as "The Poodle Dog" and "Zincand's" famous.

In the matter of general dissipation she was always careful not in any way to indulge in excesses which would jeopardize her physical attractiveness, or for one moment diminish her sense of keen worldly calculation.

In time she married. It was, of course, a failure. Her vacillating nature was such that she could not be absolutely true to the man to whom she had given her life, and after several bitter experiences, she had the horror of seeing him kill himself in front of her. There was a momentary spasm of grief, a tidal wave of remorse, and then peculiar recuperation of spirits, beauty and attractiveness that so marks this type of woman. She was deceived by other men in many various ways, and finally came to that stage of life that is known in theatrical circles as being "wised up."

At the early age of 19 she married again with equally disastrous results, and later the attention of a prominent theatrical manager being called to her, she took an important part in a unique

New York production and immediately gained considerable reputation. The fact of her two marriages and that she had gone through, before reaching the age of womanhood, more escapades than most women do when they are about to depart life after having lived it to the full, was not generally known in New York, and there was not a mark upon her face or a single coarse mannerism that betrayed it. She was soft-voiced, very pretty, very girlish. Her keen sense of wordly calculation led her to believe that in order to progress in her theatrical career she must have some other influence outside of her art and dramatic accomplishment, so she attempted to infatuate, with no little success, a hard-headed, blunt and supposedly invincible theatrical manager, who, in his cold, stolid way, gave her what love there was in him. This, however, not satisfying the woman, she played two ends against the middle, and finding a young man of wealth and position who could give her in his youth, the exuberance and joy utterly apart from the character of the theatrical manager, she adopted him and for a while lived with him. Exhausting his money she cast him aside, always spending a certain part of the time with the theatrical manager. The young man became crazed, and at a restaurant tried to murder all of them.

From that time up to the opening of the play her career was a succession of brilliant coups in the matter of gaining the confidence and love, not to say some money, of men of all ages and all works in life. Her fascination was as undeniable as her insincerity of purpose. She had never made an honest effort to be an honest woman, although she had imagined herself always persecuted, the victim of circumstances, and was always ready to excuse any viciousness of character which led her into her peculiar difficulties.

An unscrupulous aunt was adopted to act as a shield for her moral transgressions, and while acknowledged to be a mistress of her business—that of acting—from a purely technical point of view, her lack of sympathy, her abuse of her dramatic temperament in her private affairs had been such as to make it impossible for her to sincerely impress audiences with real emotional power, and, therefore, without the said influences, which she always had at hand, she remained a mediocre artist.

At the time of the opening of our play she has played a summer engagement with a stock company in Denver, which has just been terminated. She has met there JOHN MADISON, a man of about twenty-seven years of age, whose position was that of a dramatic critic on one of the local papers. LAURA MURDOCK, with her usual wisdom, started in to fascinate JOHN MADISON, but found, for once in her life, she had met her match.

JOHN MADISON was good to look at, frank, verile, but a man

of broad experience, and not to be hoodwinked. For the first time LAURA MURDOCK felt that the shoe was pinching on the other foot, and without any possible indication of reciprocal affection she was slowly falling desperately, madly, honestly and decently in love with him.

She had for the past two years been the special favorite and mistress of WILLARD BROCTON. The understanding was one of pure friendship. He was a man who had a varied taste in the matter of selecting his women, was honest in a general way, and perfectly frank about his amours. He had been most generous to LAURA MURDOCK, and his close relations with several very prominent theatrical managers made it possible for him to always secure her desirable engagements, generally in New York.

With all her past experiences, tragic and otherwise, LAURA MURDOCK found no equal to this sudden, this slowly increasing love for the young Western man. At first she attempted to deceive him. Her baby face, her masterful assumption of innocence and childlike devotion made an impression upon him. He let her know in no uncertain way that he knew her record from the day she stepped on American soil in San Francisco, to the time when she had come to Denver, but still he liked her. And at the beginning of this play we find both these people thoroughly understanding each other and believing in each other's love.

JOHN MADISON is a peculiar type of the Western man. Up to the time of his meeting Laura he had always been employed either in the mines or on a newspaper west of the Mississippi River. He was one of those itinerant reporters, to-day you might find him in Seattle, to-morrow in Butte, the next week in Denver, and then possibly he would make the circuit from Los Angeles to Frisco, and then all around again. He drank his whiskey straight, played his faro fairly, and was not particular about the women with whom he went.

He started in life in the Western country at an early age. His natural talents, both for literature and general adaptability to all conditions of life, were early exemplified, but his alma mater was the barroom, and the faculty of that college, the bartenders and gamblers and general babitues who characterized them.

He seldom had social engagements outside of certain disreputable establishments, where a genial personality or an overburdened pocketbook gives entree, and where the rules of conventionality have never even been whispered. His love affairs were confined to this class of women and seldom lasted more than a week or ten days.

His editors knew him as a brilliant genius, irresponsible, unreliable, but at times inestimably valuable. He cared little for personal

appearance beyond a certain degree of neatness, and was quick on the trigger, in a time of over-heated argument could go some distance with his fists, and his whole career is best described as "happy-go-lucky."

He realized fully his ability, that he could do almost anything fairly well and some things especially well, but he never tried to accomplish anything beyond the earning of a comfortable living. Twenty-five or thirty dollars a week was all he needed; with that he could buy his liquor, treat his women, some times play a little faro, sit up all night and sleep all day, and in general lead a life of good-natured vagabondage that had always pleased him and which he had chosen as a career.

The objection of safer and saner friends to this form of livelihood was always met by him with a slap on the back and a laugh. "Don't you worry about me, partner, if I'm going to hell I'm going there with bells on," was always his rejoinder, and yet when called upon to cover some great big news story, or report some tremendously vital event, he settled down to his work with a steely determination and a grim joy that resulted in work which classified him as almost a genius. Any great mental effort of this character, any usual achievement along these lines would be immediately followed by a protracted debauch that would upset him physically and mentally for weeks at a time, but he always recovered and landed on his feet, and with the same laugh and smile again went at his work.

If there had been opportunities to meet decent women of good social standing he had always thrown them aside with the declaration that they bored him to death, and there never had entered into his heart a feeling or idea of real affection until he met Laura. He fell for a moment under the spirit of her fascination, and then, with that cold logic he analyzed her, and found out that exteriorly she had every sign of girlhood, ingenuousness, sweetness of character and possibility of affection, but that spiritually and mentally she was nothing more than a moral wreck. He observed keenly her efforts to win him and her disappointment at her failure, not that she cared so much for him personally, but that it hurt her vanity not to be successful with this good-for-nothing, good-natured vagabond, when she had met men of wealth and position whom she made kneel at her feet. He slowly observed her changing point of view and from her kittenish ingenuousness she became serious, womanly, really sincere, he knew that he had awakened in her her first decent affection, and he knew that she was awakening in him his first desire to do things and be big and worth while, and together these two drifted toward a path of decent dealing, decent ambition, decent thought, and decent love until at last they both found themselves

and acknowledged all the wickedness of what had been and planned for all the virtue and goodness of what was to be, and it is at this point that our first act begins

ELFIE ST. CLAIR is a type of a Tenderloin grafter in New York, who, after all, has been more sinned against than sinning, but who, having been imposed upon, deceived, ill-treated and bulldozed by the type of men who prey on women in New York, had turned the tables and with her charm and her beauty gone out to make the same slaughter on the other sex as she suffered with many of her sisters.

She is a woman without a moral conscience, whose entire life is dictated by a small mental operation. Coming to New York as a beautiful girl she entered the chorus. She became famous for her beauty. On every hand were the rich and despicable stagedoor vultures ready to give her any thing that a woman's heart could desire, from clothes, to horses, carriages, money and what not, but ELFIE ST. CLAIR, at this time, with a girl-like instinct, fell in love with a man connected with the company, and during all the time that she might have profited and become a rich woman by the attentions of these outsiders, she remained true to this man until finally her fame as the beauty of the city waned. The years told on her to a certain extent, and there were the others coming as young as she had been, and as good to look at, and where before the automobile of the millionaire was at hand for her, she found that through her trust in her lover that it was there for some one else, but she was content with her joys until finally the man deliberately jilted her and left her alone.

What had gone of her beauty had been replaced by a keen knowledge of human nature and of men, so she determined to give herself up entirely to a life of gain. She knew just how much champagne should be drunk without injuring one's health; she knew just what physical necessities should be indulged in to preserve to the greatest degree her remaining beauty. There was no trick of the hair-dresser, the modiste, the manicurist, or any one of the legion of people who devote their time to aiding the physical fascinations of women, which she did not know. She knew exactly what perfumes to use, what stockings to wear, how she should live, how far she should indulge in any dissipation, and all this she determined to devote to profit.

She knew that as an actress, *per se*, she had no future; that the time of a woman's beauty was limited; she was conscious of the fact that already she had lost the youthful liveness of figure that had made her so fascinating in the past, so she laid aside every sentiment, physical and spiritual, and determined to choose a man as her companion who had the biggest bankroll and the most liberal

intention. His age, his station in life, the fact whether she liked or disliked him should not enter into this scheme at all, she figured that she had been made a fool of by men and there was **only one** revenge, the accumulation of a fortune to make her independent of them once and for all.

There were, of course, certain likes and dislikes that she enjoyed, and in a way she indulged them. There were men whose company she cared for, but their association was practically sexless and had come down to a point of mere good fellowship.

WILLARD BROCKTON, a New York broker, was an honest sensualist, and when one says an honest sensualist, the meaning is a man who had none of the cad in his character, who took advantage of no one, and allowed no one to take advantage of him. He honestly detested any man who took advantage of a pure woman. He detested any man who deceived a woman. He believed that there was only one way to go through life, and that was to be frank with those with whom one dealt; although he was a master hand in stock manipulation and the questionable practices of Wall Street, he realized that he had to play his cunning and craft against the cunning and craft of others in the deep game of speculation. He was not at all in sympathy with this mode of living, but he thought it was the only method by which he could succeed in life, and he measured success in life by the accumulation of money, and he considered his business career as a thing apart from his private existence.

He never associated, to any great extent, in what is known as Society of Fifth Avenue. He kept in touch with it simply to maintain his business position. There is always an inter-relationship among the rich in business and private life, and he gave such entertainments as were necessary to the members of New York's exclusive set, simply to make certain his relative position with other successful Wall Street men.

As far as women were concerned, the certain type of actress, such as LAURA MURDOCK and ELFIE ST. CLAIR, appealed to him; he liked their good fellowship. He loved to be with a gay party at night in a cafe, he liked the rather looseness of living, which did not quite approximate the disreputable, and, in fact, his was a Bohemian nature. Behind all this, however, was a rather high-sense of honor, he detested and despised the average stagedoor Johnny, and he loathed the type of man who sought to take young girls out of theatrical companies and accomplish their ruin.

His girl friends were as wise as himself. When they entered into an agreement with him there was no deception. In the first place he wanted to like them, in the second place he wanted them to like him, and lastly, he wanted to fix the amount of their living

at a definite figure and have them stand by it. He wanted them to understand that he reserved the right at any time to withdraw his support or transfer it to some other woman, and he gave them the same privilege.

He was always ready to help anyone who was unfortunate, and he always hoped that some of these girls whom he knew would finally come across the right man, marry and settle down, but he insisted that such an arrangement could only be possible by the honest admission on the woman's part of what she had done and been, and the thorough understanding of all these things by the man involved.

He was gruff in his manner, determined in his purposes, honest in his point of view. He was a brute, almost a savage, but he was a thoroughly good brute, and a pretty decent savage.

At the time of the opening of this play he and LAURA MURDOCK had been friends for two years. He knew exactly what she was and what she had been, and their relations were those of pals. She had finished her season in Denver and he had come out there for the purpose of accompanying her home.

He had always told her that whenever she felt it inconsistent with her happiness to continue her relations with him it was her privilege to quit, and he had reserved the same condition.

ACT I.

SCENE. *The scene is that of the summer country ranch house of MRS. WILLIAMS, a friend of LAURA MURDOCK'S, and a prominent society woman of Denver, on the side of Ute Pass, near Colorado Springs. On each side of the stage are the parts of the house, nearly all the stage being devoted to the peculiar sort of court that is built in these country homes and covered by a peaked roof. Up stage where this ends is supposed to be the part of the porch overlooking the canyon, a sheer drop of 2,000 feet, while over the roof and through the porch one can see the rolling foothills and lofty peaks of the Rockies (with Pike's Peak in the distance, snow-capped and colossal. The porch is strewn with rugs and willow furniture. There is a curtain at the back of the porch or court, by which the sun can be shut off, but this is now drawn. A tea service is on a table and everything has the appearance of luxury and wealth. It is late in the afternoon and as the scene progresses the quick twilight of a canyon, beautiful in its tints of purple and amber, becomes later pitch black, and the curtain goes down on an absolutely black stage. The cyclorama or semi-cyclorama must give the perspective of greater distances, and be so painted that the various tints of twilight may be shown. The entrances are R and L in two being doors which open into each side of the ranch house. The doorway is half concealed by Japanese hangings of bamboo and bead curtains.*

AT RISE. [LAURA MURDOCK is seen up R stage leaning a bit over the balustrade of the porch and shielding her eyes with her hand from the late afternoon sun as she seemingly looks up the Pass to the L as if in expectation of discovering the approach of some one. Her gown is simple, girlish and attractive, and made of that summery, filmy stuff which women utilize so effectively. Her hair is done up in the simplest fashion with a part in the centre, and there is about her every indication of an effort to assume that girlishness of demeanor which has been her greatest asset through life. WILLARD BROCKTON enters from L; he is a man six feet or more in height, stocky in build, clean shaven and immaculately dressed. He is smoking a cigar, and upon entering takes one step forward and looks over toward LAURA in a semi-meditative manner.]

Will. Blue?

Laura. No.

Will. What's up?

Laura. Nothing.

Will. A little preoccupied, if you ask me.

Laura. Perhaps.

Will. What's up that way.

Laura. Which way?

Will. The way you are looking.

Laura. The road from Manitou Springs. They call it the trail out here.

Will. I know that. You know I've done a lot of business west of the Missouri.

Laura [*With a half-sigh.*] No, I didn't know it.

Will. Oh, yes; south of here in the San Juan country. Spent a couple of years there once.

Laura. [*Still without turning.*] That's interesting.

Will. It was then. I made some money there. It's always interesting when you make money and it's mighty dull when you don't. Still—

Laura. [*Still leaning in an absent-minded attitude.*] Still what?

Will. Can't make out why you have your eyes glued on that road—or excuse me—trail. Expect some one?

Laura. Yes

Will. One of Mrs. William's friends, eh?

Laura. Yes.

Will. Yours too?

Laura. Yes.

Will. Man?

Laura. Yes, a real man.

Will. [*Catches the significance of this speech. He carelessly throws the cigar over the balustrade. Moving for the first time he comes down C and sits in a chair with his back to Laura; she has not moved more than to place her left hand on a cushion and lean her head rather wearily against it, looking steadfastly up the Pass.*]
a real man. By that you mean—

Laura. Just that—a real man

Will. Any difference from the many you have known?

Laura. Yes, from all I have known.

Will. So that is why you didn't come into Denver to meet me to-day, but left word for me to come out here?

Laura. Yes.

Will. I thought that I was pretty decent to take a dusty ride half-way across the continent in order to keep you company on your way back to New York and welcome you to our home, but maybe I had the wrong idea.

Laura. Yes, I think you had the wrong idea.

Will. In love, eh?

Laura. Yes. In love.

Will. A new sensation.

Laura. No; the first conviction.

Will. You have had that idea before. Every woman's love is the real one when it comes. Do you make a distinction in this case, young lady?

Laura. Yes.

Will. For instance, what?

Laura. This man is poor; absolutely broke; he hasn't even got a good job. You know, Will, all the rest, including yourself, generally had some material inducement.

Will. What's his business?

Laura. He's a newspaper man.

Will. H-m-m. Romance?

Laura. Yes, if you want to call it that—Romance.

Will. Do I know him?

Laura. How could you, you only came from New York to-day and he has never been there.

[She turns and comes down and sits near him. He regards her with a rather amused, indulgent, almost paternal expression. In contrast to his big, bluff physical personality, with his iron-grey hair and his bulldog expression, LAURA looks more girlish than ever. This is imperative in order to thoroughly understand the character.]

Will. How old is he?

Laura. 27, you're 45.

Will. No, 46.

Laura. Shall I tell you about him?

Will. That depends.

Laura. On what?

Will. Yourself.

Laura. In what way?

Will. If it will interfere in the least with the plans I have made for you and for me.

Laura. And have you made any particular plans for me that have anything particularly to do with you?

Will. Yes, I have given up the lease of our apartment on West End Avenue, and I've got a house on Riverside Drive. Everything will be quiet and decent, and it'll be more comfortable for you. There's a stable nearby and your horses and car can be kept over there. You'll be your own mistress and besides I've fixed you up for a new part.

Laura. What kind of a part?

Will. One of Charlie Burgess' shows, translated from some French fellow. It's been running over in Paris, Berlin and Vienna, and all those places for a year or more, and appears to be an awful hit. It's going to cost a lot of money. I told Charlie he could put

me down for a half interest, and I'd give the money providing you got the leading role. Great part, I'm told. Kind of a cross between a musical comedy and an opera. Looks as if it might stay in New York all season. So that's the change of plan. How does it strike you?

Laura. I don't know.

Will. Feel like quitting?

Laura. I can't tell.

Will. It's the newspaper man, eh?

Laura. That would be the only reason.

Will. You've been on the square with me this summer, haven't you?

Laura. What do you mean by "on the square"?

Will. Don't evade, there's only one meaning when I say that, and you know it. I'm pretty liberal, but I draw the line in one place. You've not jumped that, have you, Laura?

Laura. No, this has been such a wonderful summer, such a wonderfully different summer. Can you understand what I mean by that when I say "wonderfully different summer"?

Will. Well, he's 27 and broke, and you're 25 and pretty, and he evidently being a newspaper man has that peculiar gift of gab that we call romantic expression, so I guess I'm not blind and you both think you've fallen in love. That it?

Laura. Yes, I think that's about it; only I don't subscribe to the "gift of gab" and the "romantic" end of it. He's a man and I'm a woman, and we both have had our experiences. I don't think, Will, that there can be much of that element of what some folks call hallucination.

Will. Then the Riverside Drive proposition and Burgess' show is off, eh?

Laura. I didn't say that.

Will. And if you go back on the Overland Limited day after to-morrow, you'd just as soon I'd go to-morrow or wait until the day after you leave?

Laura. I didn't say that, either.

Will. What's the game?

Laura. I can't tell you now.

Will. Waiting for him to come?

Laura. Exactly.

Will. Think he is going to make a proposition, eh?

Laura. I know he is.

Will. Marriage?

Laura. Possibly.

Will. You've tried that twice and took the wrong end. Are you going to play the same game again?

Laura. Yes, but with a different card.

Will. What's this young man's name?

Laura. Madison—John Madison.

Will. And his job?

Laura. Reporter.

Will. Fine matrimonial timber. I suppose you think you'll live on the extra editions.

Laura. No, we're young, there's plenty of time; I can work in the meantime and so can he, and then with his ability and my ability it will only be a matter of a year or two when things will shape themselves to make it possible.

Will. Sounds well—a year off.

Laura. If I thought you were going to make fun of me, Will, I shouldn't have talked to you.

Will. I don't want to make fun of you, but you must realize that after two years it isn't an easy thing to be dumped with so little ceremony. I know you have never given me any credit for possessing the slightest feeling, but even I can receive shocks from other sources than a break in the market.

Laura. It isn't easy for me to do this. You've been awfully kind, awfully considerate, but when I went to you it was just with the understanding that we were to be pals. You reserved the right then to quit me whenever you felt like it, and you gave me the same privilege. Now, if some girl came along who really captivated you in the right way, and you wanted to marry, it would hurt me a little—maybe a lot—for after all a woman has her vanity, but I should never forget that agreement we made, a sort of two weeks' notice clause, like people have in contracts.

Will. [*Gets up. He is evidently very much moved. Walks over and looks over the canyon. LAURA looks after him. WILL has his back to the audience and LAURA, who is seated with hands clasped in her lap, evidently suffering from some emotion herself.*] I'm not hedging, Laura. If that's the way you want it to be, I'll stand by just exactly what I said, but I'm fond of you, a damn sight fonder than I thought I was, now that I find you slipping away, but if this young fellow is on the square and he has youth and ability, and you've been on the square with him, why all right. Your life hasn't had much in it to help you get a diploma from any celestial college, and if you can start out now and be a good girl, have a good husband, and maybe some day good children, why I'm not going to stand in the way, only I don't want you to make any of those mistakes that you made before.

Laura. I know, but somehow I feel that this time the real thing has come and with it the real man. I can't tell you, Will, how much different it is, but everything I felt before seems so sort of earthly

—and somehow this love that I have for this man is so different. It's made me want to be truthful and sincere and humble for the first time in my life. The only other thing I ever had that I cared the least bit about, now that I look back, was your friendship. We have been good pals, haven't we?

Will. Yes, it's been a mighty good two years for me. I was always proud to take you around because I think you one of the prettiest things in New York, and that helps some, and you're always jolly, and you never complained. You always spent a lot of money, but it was a pleasure to see you spend it; and then you never offended me. Most women offend men by coming around looking untidy and sort of unkempt, but somehow you always knew the value of your beauty, and you always dressed up. I always thought that maybe some day the fellow would come along, grab you and make you happy in a nice way, but I thought that he'd have to have a lot of money. You know you've lived a rather extravagant life for ten years, Laura. It won't be an easy job to come down to cases and suffer for the little dainty necessities you've been used to.

Laura. I've thought all about that, and I think I understand.

Will. You know if you were working without anybody's help, Laura, you might have a hard time getting a position. As an actress you're only fair.

Laura. You needn't remind me of that. My part of my life is my own. I don't want you to start now and make it harder for me to do the right thing; it isn't fair; it isn't square, and it isn't right. You've got to let me go my own way. I'm sorry to leave you, in a way, but I want you to know that if I go with John it changes the spelling of the word mistress into wife, and comradeship into love. Now, please don't talk any more.

Will. Just a word. Is it settled?

Laura. [*Rising impatiently.*] I said I didn't know, I would know to-day, that's what I'm waiting for. Oh, I don't see why he doesn't come.

Will. [*Pointing up the Pass.*] Is that the fellow coming up here?

Laura. [*Jumping up quickly and running toward the balustrade, saying as she goes.*] Where?

Will. [*Pointing*] Up the road there. On that yellow horse.

Laura. [*Looking.*] Yes, that's John. [*She waves her handkerchief, and putting one hand to her mouth cries*] Hello!

John. [*Off stage with the effect as if he was on the road winding up toward the house.*] Hello yourself!

Laura. [*Same effect.*] Hurry up, you're late.

John. [*Same effect, a little louder.*] Better late than never.

Laura. [*Same effect.*] Hurry up.

John. [*little louder.*] Not with this horse.

Laura. [*To WILL, with enthusiastic expression.*] Now, Will, does he look like a yellow reporter?

Will. [*With a sort of sad smile.*] He is a good looking chap.

Laura. [*Looking down again at JOHN.*] Oh, he's just simply more than that.

[*Turns quickly to WILL.*]

Where's Mrs. Williams?

Will. [*Motioning with thumb toward L side of ranch house.*] Inside, I guess, up to her neck in bridge.

Laura. [*Goes hurriedly over to door.*] Mrs. Williams! Oh, Mrs. Williams!

Mrs. Williams. [*Heard off stage.*] What is it, my dear?

Laura. Mr. Madison is coming up the path.

Mrs. Williams. [*Off stage.*] That's good.

Laura. Shan't you come and see him?

Mrs. Williams. [*Same.*] Lord, no! I'm six dollars and twenty cents out now, and up against an awful streak of luck.

Laura. Shall I give him some tea?

Mrs. Williams. [*Same.*] Yes, do, dear, and tell him to cross his fingers when he thinks of me.

[*In the meantime, WILL has leaned over the balustrade evidently surveying the young man, who is supposed to be coming up the path, with a great deal of interest. Underneath his stolid, businesslike demeanor of squareness, there is undoubtedly within his heart a very great affection for LAURA. He realized that during her whole career he has been the only one who has influenced her absolutely. Since the time that they lived together he has always dominated and he has always endeavored to lead her along a path that meant the better things of a Bohemian existence. His coming all the way from New York to Denver to accompany LAURA home was simply another example of his keen interest in the woman and he suddenly finds that she has drifted away from him in a manner to which he could not in the least object, and that she had been absolutely fair and square in her agreement with him. WILL is a man who, while rough and rugged in many ways, possessed many of the finer instincts of refinement, inherent though they may have been, and his meeting with JOHN ought, therefore, to show much significance, because on his impressions of the young man depend the entire justification for his attitude in the play.*]

Laura. [*Turning toward WILL and going to him, slipping her*

hand involuntarily through his arm and looking eagerly with him over the balustrade in almost girlish enthusiasm.] Do you like him?

Will. [*Smiling.*] I don't know him.

Laura. Well, do you think you'll like him?

Will. Well, I hope I'll like him.

Laura. Well, if you hope you'll like him, you ought to think you like him. He'll turn the corner of that rock in just a minute and then you can see him. Do you want to see him?

Will. [*Almost amused at her girlish manner.*] Why, yes, do you?

Laura. Do I? Why, I haven't seen him since last night! There he is. [*Waves her hand.*] Hello, John!

John. [*His voice very close now.*] Hello, girlie! How's everything?

Laura. Fine! Do hurry.

John. Just make this horse for a minute. Hurry is not in his dictionary.

Laura. I'm coming down to meet you.

John. All—right.

Laura. [*Turns quickly to WILL.*] You don't care; you'll wait, won't you?

Will. Surely.

[*Laura hurriedly exits R and disappears. Will continues to gaze over the balustrade. He sees the two meet underneath, shows the slightest trace of his emotion, takes a fresh cigar from his case, lights it, goes down C. and sits rather dejectedly on one of the willow chairs. After a short interval LAURA comes in more like a 16-year-old girl than anything else, pulling JOHN after her. He is a tall, finely built specimen of Western manhood, a frank face, a quick nervous energy, a mind that works like lightning, a prepossessing smile, and a personality that is wholly captivating. His clothes are a bit dusty from the ride, but are not in the least pretentious, and his leggins are of canvas and spurs of brass, such as are used in the army. His hat is off and he is pulled on to the stage from the R entrance, more like a great big boy than a man. His hair is a bit tumbled, and he shows every indication of having had a rather long and hard ride.*]

Laura. [*Looking at WILL who rises.*] Here he is.

[*Then she suddenly recovers herself and realizes the position that she is in. Both men measure each other*

for a moment in silence, neither flinching the least bit, The smile has faded from John's face, and the mouth droops into an expression of firm determination. LAURA for a moment loses her ingenuousness. She is the least bit frightened at finally placing the two men face to face, and in a voice that trembles slightly from apprehension.]

Oh, I beg your pardon! Mr. Madison, this is Mr. Brockton, a friend of mine from New York; you've often heard me speak of him; he came out here to keep me company when I go home.

John. [*Comes forward, extends a hand, looking WILL right in the eye.*] I am very glad to know you, Mr. Brockton.

Will. Thank you.

John. I've heard a great deal about you and your kindness to MISS MURDOCK. Anything that you have done for her in a spirit of friendless I am sure all her friends must deeply appreciate, and I count myself in as one.

Will. [*In an easy manner that rather disarms the antagonistic attitude of John.*] Then we have a good deal in common, Mr. Madison, for I also count Miss Murdock a friend, and when two friends of a friend have the pleasure of meeting, I daresay that's a pretty good foundation for them to become friends, too.

John. Possibly. Whatever my opinion may have been of you, Mr. Brockton, before you arrived, now I have seen you, and I'm a man who forms his conclusions right off the bat; I don't mind telling you that you've agreeably surprised me—that's just a first impression, but they're kind o' strong with me.

Will. Well, young man, I generally size up a fellow in pretty short order, and all things being equal, I think you'll do.

Laura. [*Radiantly.*] Shall I get the tea?

John. Tea!

Laura. Yes, tea. You know it must be tea—nothing stronger.

John. [*Looking at Will rather comically.*] How strong are you for that tea, Mr. Brockton?

Will. I'll pass, it's your deal, Mr. Madison.

John. Mine! No, deal me out this hand.

Laura. I don't think you're at all pleasant, but I'll tell you one thing, it's tea this deal or no game.

Will. No game then, and I'm going to help Mrs. Williams; maybe she's lost nearly seven dollars by this time, and I'm an awful dub when it comes to bridge.

John. Me too. Outside of poker I don't understand the language, although I have occasionally snowballed the faro bank.

Will. [*Who has Xed over to L and about to enter door.*] Trouble with that game is the snowballs melt too fast.

John. Oh, not if you carry one under your arm for a long time until it gets nice and icy, then hit the high card right in the snoot.

Will. I'll try my luck with Mrs. Williams.

[Leaving, he nods and exits. As the act progresses the shadows cross the Pass and the golden light streams across the lower hills and tops the snow-clad peaks. It becomes darker and darker, the lights fade to beautiful adolescent hues, until, when the curtain comes on the act, with JOHN and WILL on the scene, it is pitch dark, a faint glow coming out of the door at R, but nothing else can be seen but the glow of the coal on the end of each man's cigar as he puffs it in silent meditation of their conversation.]

Laura. *[As WILL exits and looking up into JOHN's eyes.]* Well?

John. Well, dear?

Laura. Are you going to be cross with me?

John. Why?

Laura. Because he came.

John. Brockton?

Laura. Yes.

John. You didn't know, did you?

Laura. Yes, I did.

John. That he was coming?

Laura. He wired me when he reached Kansas City.

John. Does he know?

Laura. About us?

John. Yes.

Laura. I've told him.

John. When?

Laura. To-day.

John. Here?

Laura. Yes.

John. With what result?

Laura. I think it hurt him.

John. Naturally.

Laura. More than I had any idea it would.

John. I'm sorry.

Laura. He cautioned me to be very careful and to be sure I knew my way.

John. That was right.

[He sits down in one of the big willow chairs and Laura comes and sits on the arm, her arm around its back and her arm lightly touching John's shoulder.]

Laura. John.

John. Yes.

Laura. We've been very happy all summer.

John. Very.

Laura. And this thing has gradually been growing on us?

John. That's true.

Laura. And now the season's over and there is nothing to keep me in Colorado, and I've got to go back to New York to work.

John. I know; I've been awake all night thinking about it.

Laura. Well?

John. Well?

Laura. What are we going to do?

John. Why, you've got to go, I suppose.

Laura. Is it good-bye or—or—not?

John. For a while, I suppose—it's good-bye.

Laura. What do you mean by a while?

John. Until I get money enough together, and am making enough to support you, then come and take you out of the show business and make you Mrs. Madison.

[LAURA tightens her arm around his neck, her cheek goes close to his own, and all the wealth of affection that the woman is capable of at times is shown. She seems more like a dainty little kitten purring close to its master. Her whole thought and idea seem to be centered on the man whom she professes to love.]

Laura. John; that is what I want above everything else.

John. But, Laura, we must come to some distinct understanding before we start to make our plans. We're not children.

Laura. No, we're not.

John. Now, in the first place, we'll discuss you, and in the second place, we'll discuss me. We'll keep nothing from each other and we'll start out on this campaign of decency and honor, fully understanding its responsibilities, without a chance of a come-back on either side.

Laura. [Getting very serious.] You mean that we should tell each other all about each other, so, no matter what's ever said about us by some other people we'll know it first.

John. That's precisely what I'm trying to get at.

Laura. Well, John, there are so many things I don't want to speak of even to you; it isn't easy for a woman to go back and accuse herself on one hand while she tries to excuse herself on the other. Only I came to this country when I was nothing but a child, and I didn't know, and many things have happened, and I've drifted along what I found was the easiest way, and now that I have met you, and really love you, and want to make you an honorable wife, I found that I have gone the hardest way, and that all the bridges I might have passed over to a road of pleasant, lovely womanhood,

I have burned behind me. You're all I've got left.

John. I've known from the first. I've known how you came to San Francisco as a kid and got into the show business, and how you went wrong, and then how you married and how your husband didn't treat you exactly right. He didn't understand, and he was jealous, and then how, in a fit of drunkenness, he came home and shot himself in front of your feet. [*Laura buries her head in her hands.*] This was a good many years ago. I know all about your second marriage. I know the man you have been with, and how you've lived, and that you and this man Brockton have been—well—I can't say it; I've known it all for months, and I've watched you. Now, Laura, the habit of life is a hard thing to get away from. You've lived in this luxury—never mind the price—but you've lived in it for ten years. If I ask you to be my wife you'll have to give it up; you'll have to go back to New York and struggle on your own hook until I get enough to come for you. I don't know how long that will be, but it *will* be. Do you love me enough to stick out for the right thing?

[*Laura puts her arms around him, kisses him once very affectionately, looks at him very earnestly.*]

Laura. Yes. I think this is my one great chance. I do love you and I want to do just that.

John. I think you will. I'm going to make the same promise. Your life, dear girl, has been an angel's compared with mine. I've drank whiskey, played bank and raised hell ever since the time I could develop a thirst and stay out all night without the old man giving me a licking in the morning, and ever since I've been able to go out and earn my own living I've abused every natural gift God gave me. I've never cared for only just enough to get along, and the word decency to me was like a red flag in a bull's face. The women I've associated with aren't good enough to touch the hem of your skirt, but they liked me, and, well—I must have liked them, partly because I was becoming slowly degraded, and partly because I didn't have anything else to do. My life hasn't been exactly loose, it's been all in pieces. I've never done anything dishonest, but outside of that I guess I've broken all the commandments with a smile on my face, and looked for the twelfth or thirteenth to see if it existed. I've gone wrong just for the fun of it, all my life, until I met you. Somehow then I began to feel that I was making an awful waste of myself. I never once fooled myself about you. Some lovers place a woman on a pedestal and say she can't be bad, and she never was bad. Well, I'm placing you on a pedestal and it'll read, "You *won't* be bad."

Laura. [*Kissing him.*] John, I'll never make you take those words back.

John. That goes double. You're going to cut out the cabs and cafes, and I'm going to cut out the whiskey and all-night sessions, and you're going to be somebody, and I'm going to be somebody, and if my hunch is worth the powder to blow it up, we're going to show folks things they never thought were in us. Kiss me now to seal the deal.

[She kisses him; tears are in her eyes. He looks up into her face with a quaint smile.]

John. You're on, ain't you, dear?

Laura. Yes, I'm on.

John. Then (*Points toward door.*) call him and tell him you go back to New York without any traveling companion this season.

Laura. Brockton?

John. Yes.

Laura. Now?

John. Sure.

Laura. You want to hear me tell him?

John. [*With a smile.*] We're partners, aren't we? I ought to be in on any important transaction like that, but it's just as you say.

Laura. I think it would be right you should. I'll call him now.

John. All right.

[She Xes to door L; twilight is becoming very much more pronounced.]

Laura. [*At door.*] Mr. Brockton! Oh, Mr. Brockton!

Will. [*Off stage.*] Yes.

Laura. Can you spare a moment to come out here?

Will. Just a moment; I've lost nearly a dollar and thirty cents.

Laura. This is very immediate, quite imperative, can't you come?

Will. All right. [*She waits for him and after a reasonable interval he appears at door.*] Laura, it's a shame to lure me away from that mad speculation in there. I thought I might make my fare back to New York if I played until next Summer. What's up?

Laura. Mr. Madison wants to talk to you, or rather I do, and I want him to listen.

Will. [*His manner changing to one of cold, stolid calculation.*] Very well.

[They come to C of stage. WILL sits down in chair near JOHN and LAURA takes a position so she can address them both in three-quarters view to audience.]

Laura. Will.

Will. Yes?

Laura. I'm going home day after to-morrow on the Overland Limited.

Will. I know.

Laura. It's awfully kind of you to come out here to go home with

me, but under the circumstances I'd rather you'd take an earlier or a later train.

Will. And may I ask what circumstances you refer to?

Laura. Mr. Madison has asked me to be his wife. He knows of your former friendship for me, and he seems to have the idea that it's discontinuance is necessary in considering our future plan.

Will. Then the Riverside Drive proposition with Burgess' show thrown in is declared off, eh?

Laura. Yes; everything is absolutely and permanently declared off.

Will. Can't even be friends any more, eh?

John. You could hardly expect Miss Murdock to be friendly with you under the circumstances. You could hardly expect me to sanction any such friendship.

Will. I think I understand your position, young man, and I perfectly agree with you, that is—if your plans come out pleasantly.

Laura. Then everything is settled; just the way it ought to be—frankly and above board?

Will. Why, I guess so. If I was perfectly confident that this new arrangement was going to result happily for you both, I think I'd be glad, only I'm somewhat doubtful, for when people become serious and then fail, I know how hard those things hit, having *been* hit once myself.

John. So you think we're making a wrong move and there isn't a chance of success.

Will. No, I don't make any such gloomy prophecy. If you make Laura a good husband, and she makes you a good wife, and together you win out, I'll be mighty glad. I shall absolutely and utterly efface from my mind every thought of Laura's friendship for me.

Laura. I thought you'd be just that way.

Will. [*Rising.*] And now I must be off. [*Takes her by both hands and shakes them.*] Good-bye, girlie! Madison, good luck. [*Shakes JOHN'S hands, looks into his eyes.*] I think you've got the stuff in you to succeed, if your foot don't slip.

John. What do you mean by my foot slipping, Mr. Brockton?

Will. You want me to tell you?

John. I sure do.

Will. Laura, run into the house and see if Mrs. Williams has won another quarter. Madison and I are going to smoke a cigar and have a friendly chat, and when we get through I think we'll both be better off.

Laura. We're all going to ride in town by moonlight in the buckboard—that is, after dinner. I'll leave you two together.

[*She goes toward the door and turns. Exit. Both men*

sit down, one L and one just R of C.]

Will. Have a cigar?

John. Thank you!

[Takes cigar.]

Will. What's your business?

John. I work for a newspaper.

Will. I know. What capacity?

John. Sort or general utility reporter most of the time and dramatic critic on Sunday and Monday nights.

Will. Pay you well?

John. That's rather impertinent, isn't it?

Will. Exactly. I'm going to be impertinent, do you mind?

John. What's the game?

Will. I'm interested. I'm a plain man, Mr. Madison, and I do my business in a plain way. My experience extends as far east of the Missouri as yours does west. Now, if I ask you a few questions and discuss this matter with you in a frank way, don't get it in your head that I'm jealous or sore, but simply I don't want either of you people to make a move that's going to cost you a lot of pain and trouble. If you want me to talk sense to you, all right. If you don't, we'll drop it now. What's the answer?

John. I'll take a chance, and I want to say, that while personally you seem to be pretty decent, the class of people that you belong to I despise; they don't speak my language. You are what they call a manipulator of stocks; that means that you're living on the weaknesses of other people, and it almost means that you get your daily bread and your cake and your wine from the production of other people. You're the class of man that I call a "gambler under cover." Show me a man who's dealing bank and he's free and above board. You can sit down with a pencil and paper and figure the percentage against you, and then if you buck the tiger and get stung, you do it with your eyes open. With you and your alias of financier you play the game crooked twelve months of the year. You may be a fine man, but from a business point of view I think you're a crook. Now, I guess we understand each other. If you've got anything to say, why spill it.

Will. I like your talk for the sake of argument, but we're not talking business now, but women. How much money do you earn?

John. Thirty dollars a week.

Will. Do you know how much Laura could make if she just took a job on her own merits?

John. As I don't intend to share in her salary, I never took the trouble to inquire.

Will. She'd get about forty dollars.

John. That laps me ten.

Will. How are you going to support her? Her cabs cost more than your salary, and she pays her week's salary for an every-day walking hat. She's always had a maid; her simplest gown flirts with a hundred-dollar note; her manicurist and her hairdresses will eat up as much as you pay for your board. She never walks when it's stormy, and every afternoon there's her ride in the park. She dines at the best cafes in New York and one meal costs her more than you make in a day. Do you imagine for a moment that she's going to sacrifice these luxuries for any great length of time?

John. I intend to give them to her.

Will. On thirty dollars a week?

John. I propose to go out and make a lot of money.

Will. How?

John. I've not decided, but you can bet your sweet life that if I ever try and make up my mind that it's got to be, it's got to be.

Will. Never have made it, have you?

John. I have never tried.

Will. Then how do you know you can?

John. Well, I've got twice as much brains as you have, and I'm honest and energetic; if you can cheat people out of great wealth I don't see why I can't earn a little.

Will. There's where you make a mistake. Money getting doesn't always come with brilliancy. I know a lot of fellows in New York who can paint a great picture, write a good play, and when it comes to oratory, they've got me lashed to a pole, but they're always in debt. They never get anything for what they do. In other words, young man, they are like a sky rocket without a stick, plenty of brilliancy, but no direction and they blow up and fizzle all over the ground.

John. That's New York. I'm in Colorado and don't you forget it.

Will. I hope you'll make your money because I tell you frankly that's the only way you can hold this girl. A woman of the type of Laura lives on her vanity. She's full of heroics now, self-sacrifice and all the things that go to make up the third act of a play, but the minute she comes to darn her stockings, wash out her own handkerchiefs and dry them on the window and send out for a pail of coffee and a sandwich for lunch, take it for me it will go Blah! You're in Colorado writing her letters once a day with no checks in them. That may be all right for some girl who hasn't tasted the joy of easy living, full of the good things of life, but one, who for ten years has been doing very well in the way these women do, is not going to let up for any great length of time. So take my tip, if you want to hold her, get that money quick, and don't be so damned particular how you get it.

[JOHN'S *patience is evidently severely tried. He approaches*

WILL *who remains impassive.*]

John. Of course, you know you've got the best of me.

Will. How?

John. We're guests.

Will. No one's listening.

John. Tisn't that. If it was anywhere but here, right within the call of the woman you've insulted—if there was any way to avoid all the nasty scandal—I'd punch you in the jaw and you know it. I don't know how you make your money, but I know what you do with it. You buy yourself a small circle of parasites and sycophants—you pay them well for feeding your vanity—and then you pose—pose with a certain frank admission of vice and degradation and those who aren't quite as brazen as you call it manhood—Manhood? And *you* dogging the heels of unfortunate women with your money. Why, you don't know what the first syllable means, let alone the last. It's cowardice—the cowardice of a pup and a cur.

Will. [*Rising angrily.* Wait a minute, young man, or I'll—

[*Both men stand confronting each other for a moment with fists clinched. They are on the very verge of a personal encounter. The chatter of the card players can be heard from the next room. Both seem to realize that they have gone too far.*]

John. You'll what?

Will. Lose my temper and make a fool of myself. That's something I've not done for—let me see—why, it must be nearly twenty years— Oh, yes, fully that.

[*He smiles; John relaxes and takes one step back.*]

John. Possibly it's been about that length of time since you were human, eh?

Will. Possibly—but you see, Mr. Madison, after all you're at fault. The very first thing you did was to lose your temper. Now, people who always lose their temper will never make a lot of money, and you admit that that is a great necessity—I mean now—to you.

John. I can't stand for the brutal way you talk.

[*WILL sits down and pauses for a moment. JOHN looks at him in the fading light and also takes his chair. WILL takes up the discussion in the most matter-of-fact tone.*]

Will. But you have got to stand it. The truth is never gentle. That's the pretention of the truth that brushes down the ruffled feathers. Most conditions in life are unpleasant, and if you want to meet them squarely, you have got to realize the unpleasant point of view. That's the only way you can fight them and win.

John. Still, I believe Laura means what she says. I feel certain of that, and I believe in her despite all you say and the disagreeable

logic of it. I think she loves me. If she should ever want to go back to the old way of getting along, I think she'd tell me so. She'd never do anything to wreck my life. So you see, Brockton, all your talk is wasted. I love her and I believe in her and we'll drop the subject.

Will. And if she ever should come to me, I am going to insist that she let you know all about it. It'll be hard enough to lose her, caring for her the way you do, but it would hurt a lot more to be double crossed.

John. [*Sarcastically.*] That's very kind. Thanks!

Will. Don't get sore. It's common sense and it goes, does it not?

John. Just what?

Will. If she leaves you first, you are to tell me, and if she comes to me I'll make her let you know just when and why.

John. All right.

Will. Agreed?

[*A pause.*]

John. You're on.

[*By this time the stage is black and all that can be seen is the glow of the two cigars. As the murmur of the voices of the card players in the next room is heard, the curtain comes down slowly.*]

ACT II.

SCENE. *Six months have elapsed. The furnished room of LAURA MURDOCK, second story back of an ordinary, cheap theatrical lodging house in the theatre district of New York. The room is of the old-fashioned brown stone front house type with a high ceiling, dingy walls and long, rather insecure windows. The woodwork is depressingly dark, the stain is cracked and the paper is old, spotted and uninviting. There is a door up R leading to the hallway and up C is a folding bed. To the R. of that in the upper left hand corner of the stage is a dresser. On this dresser is a small alcohol lamp such as is used for curling irons and all other necessary toilet articles. There is a door down L leading to a closet, and next to that is a washstand with the usual paraphernalia of white crockery. A sofa or rather dilapidated tete-a-tete is down stage L C. There are several chairs, a table and a dilapidated desk, which is down R near the door. The fixtures are old and supposed to burn gas instead of electricity. In the most appropriate places and with a rather smart woman's efficiency of distribution are photographs here and there, an occasional pennant of some college, attractive posters, so that in this simple and primitive manner it can be seen that the room is given a more cheerful appearance.*

AT RISE. *At rise of curtain the stage is empty. LAURA enters R. She is in furs and a rather fetching gown, but the whole gives one the impression of having been of the season's before vintage. Her beauty is still untouched, and as she enters she crosses and goes to closet, where she takes off her coat and hat and gloves. She discovers in one glove a tear, and going to the dresser gets needles and thread, sits down and takes a couple of stitches in it. She surveys herself in the mirror and critically looks at her dress. The suggestion to be conveyed is that things that she has are rather in a worn condition. This task completed, she stands looking meditatively out of the window. There is everything about her appearance and actions that denotes deep concern. She crosses to the desk, and reaching into a cubby-hole pulls out a large package of letters. She runs over them thoroughly, takes one from the bottom, opens it, starts to read it and then it drops listlessly into her lap. Her depression is obvious. She folds the letter and returns it to the envelope and is deeply engrossed in thought. Someone is heard rather laboriously and noisily climbing the stairway. There is a knock.*

Laura. Come in.

[ANNIE, a chocolate-colored negress enters. She is slovenly in appearance, but must not in any way denote the Mammy. She is the type one encounters in cheap theatrical lodging houses. She has a letter in her hand and approaches LAURA.)

Annie. Here's your mail, Miss Laura.

Laura. [Taking letter.] Thank you!

[She looks at the address and does not open it.]

Annie. Dat one comes every morning. I just thought I would bring it up to you.

Laura. Thank you!

Annie. Must be mighty smart to write you every day. The postman brings it 11 o'clock most always, sometimes 12, and again sometimes 10, but it comes every day, don't it?

Laura. I know.

Annie. Guess must be from your husband, ain't it?

Laura. No. I haven't any.

Annie. Dat's what I tole Mrs. Farley when she was down talkin' about you dis morning. She said if he all was yo' husban' he might do somethin' to help you out. I tole her I didn't think you had any husband. Den she says you ought to have one, you're so beautiful. Mrs. Farley said you might have most any man you wanted just for de asking, but I said you was too particular about the man you'd want. Den she did a heap o' talking.

Laura. About what?

Annie. Well, you know, Mrs. Farley she's been havin' so much trouble with her roomers. Yesterday that young lady on the second floor front she left. She's goin' with some company on the road. She owed her room for three weeks and just had to leave her trunk. My! how Mrs. Farley did scold her. Mrs. Farley let on she could have paid that money if she wanted to, but somehow I guess she couldn't, for if she could she wouldn't have left her trunk, would she, Miss Laura?

Laura. No, I suppose not. What did Mrs. Farley say about me?

Annie. Oh! nothing much.

Laura. Well, what?

Annie. She kind a say somethin' you being two weeks behind in yo' room rent and she said she thought you might get the money for her because you had such stylish friends come to see you.

Laura. Who, for instance?

Annie. Well, dat Miss St. Clair, I guess. Mrs. Farley said she had an awful lot of money and like as not could help you out some. [Pause.] Ain't you got nobody to look after you, Miss Laura?

Laura. No.

Annie. Dat's too bad.

Laura. Why?

Annie. Dat telephone man come here this morning and because Mrs. Farley couldn't pay him he took the telephone out and she said if she didn't get somebody in her house who had regular money soon she would just have to close up and go to the poor house.

Laura. I'm sorry; I'll try again to-day.

Annie. Ain't you got any job at all?

Laura. No.

Annie. When you came here you had lots of money and you was mighty good to me, but I guess nobody got jobs now. They're so many actors and actresses out of work, Mrs. Farley says, she don't know how she's going to live. She said you'd been mighty nice up until two weeks ago, but you ain't got much left, have you, Miss Laura?

Laura. [*Rising and going to the window.*] No. It's all gone.

Annie. My sakes! All dem rings and things? You ain't done sold them?

Laura. They're pawned. What did Miss Farley say she was going to do?

Annie. Guess maybe I'd better not tell.

Laura. Please do.

Annie. You been so nice to me, Miss Laura. Never was anybody in dis house give me so much, and when Miss Farley said you must either pay yo' rent or she would ask you for your room, I jest set right down on the back kitchen stairs and cried. Besides, Mrs. Farley don't like me very well since you've been havin' your breakfasts and dinner brought up here.

Laura. Why not?

Annie. She has a rule in this house that nobody can use her china or forks or spoons who ain't boarding here, and the other day when you asked me to bring up a knife and fork she ketched me coming upstairs and she says where you goin' wid all dose things, Annie? I said, I'm just going up to Miss Laura's room with that knife and fork? I sayd, I'm goin up for nothin' at all, Mrs. Farley, she just wants to look at them I guess. She said she wants to eat her supper up there. I got real mad, and I told her if she'd give me the three weeks she owed me I'd brush right out of here, dat's all. I'm gettin' sick of this job anyway. I wish she'd give me my pay—it's three weeks now.

Laura. I'm sorry, Annie, if I've caused you any trouble. Never mind, I'll be able to pay the rent to-morrow or next day anyway. [*She goes to her purse, fumbles in it, takes out a quarter and turns to Annie.*] Here.

Annie. No ma'm, I don't want that.

Laura. Please take it.

Annie. No ma'm, I don't want it. You need that. Dat's break-fast money for you, Miss Laura.

Laura. Please take it Annie. I might just as well get rid of this as anything else.

Annie. [*Takes it rather reluctantly.*] You always was so good, Miss Laura. Sure you don't want dis?

Laura. Sure.

Annie. Sure you're goin' to get plenty more?

Laura. Sure.

Mrs. Farley's voice. [*Downstairs.*] Annie! Annie!

Annie [*Going to door.*] Yassum, Mrs. Farley.

Same Voice. Is Miss Murdock up there?

Annie. Yassum, Mrs. Farley, yassum!

Mrs. F. Anything doin'?

Annie [*At door.*] I—I—hain't asked, Missy Farlev.

Mrs. F. Then do it.

Laura. [*Coming to the rescue at the door.*] [*To Annie.*] I'll answer her. [*Out of door to Mrs. Farley.*] What is it, Mrs. Farley?

Mrs. Farley. [*Her voice softened.*] Did ye have any luck this morning?

Laura. No, but I promise you faithfully to help you out this afternoon or to-morrow.

Mrs. F. Sure? Are you certain?

Laura. Absolutely.

Mrs. F. Well I must say——

[*Laura* quietly closes the door and *Mrs. F's* rather strident voice is heard indistinctly. *LAURA* sighs and walks toward the window. *Annie* looks after her and then slowly opens the door.]

Annie. Yo' sure there ain't nothin' I can do fo' you, Miss Laura?

Laura. Nothing.

[*ANNIE* exits. *LAURA* sits down and looks at letter, turning it around in her hand and then slowly opening it. It consists of several pages closely written. She reads some of them hurriedly, skims through the rest and then turns to the last page, without reading; glances at it, folds it, rises and carelessly throws it on the desk.]

Laura. Hope, just nothing but hope.

[*Her despondency is palpable, and she again goes to the window, aimlessly looking out on the snow-covered roofs of the houses. There is a timid knock at the door.*]

Laura. [*Without turning, and in a rather tired tone of voice.*]; Come in.

[JIM WESTON, a rather shabby theatrical advance agent of the old school, enters timidly, halting at the door and holding the knob in his hand. He is a man of about 40 years old, dressed in an ordinary manner, rather of medium height, and in fact has the appearance of a rather prosperous clerk who has been in hard luck. His relations with Laura are those of pure friendship. They both live in the same lodging place, and both having been out of employment, they have naturally become acquainted.]

Jim. Can I come in?

Laura. [Without turning.] Hello, Jim.

[He closes door and enters, taking chair down right.]

Laura. Any luck?

Jim. Lots of it.

Laura. That's good. Tell me.

Jim. It's bad luck. Guess you don't want to hear.

Laura. I'm sorry. Where have you been?

[She turns and busies herself around the room.]

Jim. I kind o' felt around up at Burgess' office. I thought I might get a job there, but he put me off until to-morrow. Somehow those fellows always do business to-morrow.

Laura. Yes, and there's always to-day to look after.

Jim. I'm ready to give up. I've tramped Broadway for nine weeks until every piece of flagstone gives me the laugh when it sees my feet coming. Got a letter from the Missis this morning. The kids got to have some clothes, and she's hard up for shoes and stuff like that. I've just got to raise some money or get some work, or the first thing you know I'll be hanging around Central Park on a dark night with a club.

Laura. I know just how you feel. It's pretty tough for me, but it must be a whole lot worse for you with a wife and child.

Jim. Oh, if a man's alone he can generally get along, turn his hand to anything, but a woman——

Laura. Worse, you think?

Jim. I was just thinking about you and what Burgess said?

Laura. What was that?

Jim. You know Burgess and I used to be in the circus business together. He took care of the grafters when I was boss canvas man. I never could see any good in shaking down the Rubes for all the money they had and then taking part of it. He used to run the privilege car, you know.

Laura. That so?

Jim. Had charge of all the pickpockets—dips we called 'em—sure thing gamblers and the like. Made him rich. I kept sort o'

on the level and I'm broke. Guess it don't pay to be honest——

[*Laura turns to him and in a significant voice:*]

Laura. You don't really think that?

Jim. No, maybe not. Ever since I married the missis and the first kid come we figured the only good money was the kind folks worked for and earned—but when you can't get hold of that it's tough.

Laura. I know.

Jim. Burgess don't seem to be losing sleep over the tricks he's turned. He's happy and prosperous, but I guess he ain't any better now than he was then.

Laura. Maybe not. I've been trying to get an engagement from him. There are half a dozen parts in his new attractions that I could do, but he has never said "no" absolutely, but somehow he's never said "yes."

Jim. He spoke about you.

Laura. In what way?

Jim. I gave him my address and he seen it was yours, too. Asked if I lived in the same place.

Laura. Was that all?

Jim. Wanted to know how you was getting on. I let him know you needed work, but I didn't tip my hand you was flat broke. He said something about you being a damned fool.

Laura. [*Suddenly and interested.*] How?

Jim. Well, Johnny Ensworth, you know he used to do the fights on the Evening Journal. Now he's press agent for Burgess. Nice fellow and way on the inside. He told me where you were in wrong.

Laura. What have I done?

Jim. Burgess don't put up the money for any of them musical comedies he trails. Of course he's got a lot of influence, and he's always Johnny-on-the-Spot to turn any dirty trick that they want. There are four or five rich men in town that are there with the bank roll providing he engages women outside the stars who ain't so very particular about the location of their residence when they're not on the stage, and who don't hear a curfew ring at 11.30 every night.

Laura. And he thinks I am too particular?

Jim. That's what was slipped me. Seems that one of the richest men that is in on Mr. Burgess' address book is a fellow named Brockton from down town some place. He's got more money than the Shoe and Leather National Bank. He likes to play show business.

Laura. [*Rises quickly.*] Oh!

Jim. I thought you knew him. I thought it was just as well to

tell you where he and Burgess stand. They're pals.

Laura. [*Coming over to Jim and with emphasis.*] I don't want you to talk about him or any of them. I just want you to know that I'm trying to do everything in my power to go through this season without any more trouble. I've pawned everything I've got, even some of my clothes. I've cut every friend I knew. There's only one girl that I allow to come to see me, but where am I going to end? That's what I want to know—where am I going to end? Every place I look for a position something interferes. It's almost as if I were blacklisted. I know I could get jobs all right if I wanted to pay the price, but I won't. I just want to tell you I won't.

Jim. That's the way to talk. I don't know you very well, but I've watched you close. I ain't never done a crooked act in my life. I'm just a common ordinary showman who never had much money, and I'm going out o' date. I've spent most of my time with nigger minstrel shows and circuses, but I've been on the square. That's why I'm broke. [*Rather sadly.*] Once I thought the Missis would have to go back to toe dancing, but she couldn't do that, she's grown so damn fat. [*To LAURA, cheerfully.*] Just you don't mind. It'll all come out right.

Laura. [*Goes over to him.*] It's an awful tough game, isn't it?

Jim. [*Taking her hand.*] It's hell forty ways from the Jack. It's tough for me, but for a pretty woman with a lot o' rich fools jumping out o' their automobiles and hanging around stage doors, it must be something awful. I ain't blaming the women. They say "self-preservation was the first law of nature," and I guess that's right, but sometimes when the show is over and I see them fellows with their hair parted on one side, smoking cigarettes in a holder long enough to reach from here to Harlem, and a bank roll that would bust my pocket and turn my head, I feel like as if I'd like to get a gun and go a-shooting around this old town—yes I do—you bet.

Laura. That wouldn't pay, would it?

Jim. No, they're not worth the job of sitting on that throne in Sing Sing, but all them fellows under 19 and over 59 ain't much use to themselves or anyone else. They never produce anything but trouble and somebody else's coin, and they don't always produce that!

Laura. [*Rather meditatively.*] Perhaps all of them are not so bad.

Jim. Yes, they are. Angels and all. Last season I had one of them shows where a rich fellow backed it on account of a girl. We lost money and got stuck down in Texas. I telegraphed "Must have a thousand or can't move." He just answered, "Don't

move"—we didn't.

Laura. But that was business.

Jim. Bad business. It took a year for some of them folks to get back to Broadway. Some of the girls never did, and I guess never will

Laura. Maybe they're better off, Jim.

Jim. Couldn't be worse. [*There is a moment of gloomy silence.*] [*To himself.*] Wish I knew how to do something else. Being a mechanic or a carpenter or something like that—those fellows always have jobs.

Laura. So do I. But we don't know and we've got to make the best of it.

Jim. I guess so. [*Opens door a little.*] I'll see you this evening. I hope you'll have good news by that time.

Laura. Good bye.

[*Bus.* JIM starts to exit, starts to close door behind him, then retreats a step with hand on door knob.]

Jim. [*In a voice meant to be kindly.*] If you'd like to go to the theatre to-night and take some other woman in the house, maybe I can get a couple of tickets for some of the shows. I know a lot of fellows who are working.

Laura. No, thanks. I haven't anything to wear to the theatre, and I don't—

Jim. [*Rising, and with a smile going over to her and taking her hand.*] Now you just cheer up! Something's sure to turn up. It always has for me, and I'm a lot older than you both in years and in this business. There's always a break in hard luck sometimes—that's sure.

Laura. [*Smiling through her tears.*] I hope so. But things are looking pretty hopeless now, don't they?

Jim. I'll go down and give Mrs. F. a line o' talk and try to square you for a couple of days more anyway. But I guess she's laying pretty close to the cushion, poor woman.

Laura. Annie says a lot of people owe her.

Jim. You can't pay what you haven't got. And even if money was growing on trees, it's winter now. [*Jim goes towards door.*] I'm off, maybe to-day is lucky day. [*He starts towards door and stops.*] So long!

Laura. Goodbye.

[JIM exits.

[LAURA stands still for a moment in deep thought. She goes to the desk, picks up the letter received as if to read it, and then throws it down in anger—she sits on tete and buries her head in hands.

Laura. I can't stand it—I just simply can't stand it.

Mrs. Farley's voice. [*Off stage.*] Miss Murdock—Miss Mur-

dock.

Laura. [*Rises, goes to door R. and opens it.*] What is it?

Same Voice. There's a lady down here to see you.

Elfie's Voice. [*Off stage.*] Hello, dearie, can I come up?

Laura. Is that you, Elfie?

Elfie. Yes, shall I come up?

Laura. Why certainly.

[*She waits at the door for a moment and ELFIE ST. CLAIR appears. She is gorgeously gowned in the rather extreme style affected by the usual New York woman who is cared for by a gentleman of wealth and who has not gone through the formality of matrimonial alliance. Her conduct is always exaggerated and her attitude vigorous. Her gown is of the latest design, and in every detail of dress she knows evidence of a most extravagant expenditure. She carries a handbag of gold, upon which are attached such trifles as a gold cigarette case, a gold powder box, pencils, and such things. ELFIE throws her arms around LAURA and both exchanges kisses.*]

Elfie. Laura, you old dear, I've just found out where you've been hiding, and came around to see you.

Laura. [*Who is much brightened by ELFIE'S appearance.*] Elfie, you're looking bully; how are you, dear? Come in and sit down. I haven't much to offer, but—

Elfie. Oh, never mind, it's such a grand day outside, and I've come around in my car to take you out. You know I've got a new one, and it can go some.

Laura. [*Changing her expression.*] I am sorry but I can't go out this afternoon, Elfie. ..

Elfie. What's the matter?

Laura. You see I'm staying home a good deal nowadays, I haven't been feeling very well and I don't go out much.

Elfie. [*Sitting down on the tete-a-tete.*] I should think not, I haven't seen you in Rector's or Martin's since you came back from Denver. Got a glimpse of you one day trailing up Broadway, but couldn't get to you, you dived into some office or other. [*For the first time she surveys the room.*] Whatever made you come into a dump like this? It's the limit.

Laura. [*Turning on her friend and standing back of the table.*] Oh, I know it isn't pleasant, but it's my home, and a home's a home.

Elfie. [*Lounging on the tete-a-tete and lifting her skirts far enough to display her neat foot covering and hosiery.*] Looks more like a prison. Makes me think of the old days of Child's sinkers and a hall bed-room.

Laura. It's comfortable.

Elfie. Not! What's the matter with you anyway?

Laura. Nothing.

Elfie. Yes, there is. What happened between you and Brockton? He's not broke, because I saw him the other day.

Laura. Where?

Elfie. In the park. Asked me out to luncheon, but I couldn't go. You know, dearie, I've got to be so careful. Jerry's so awful jealous—the old fool.

Laura. Do you see much of him now, Elfie?

Elfie. Not any more than I can help and be nice. He gets on my nerves. Of course I've heard all about you.

Laura. Then why do you ask?

Elfie. Just wanted to hear from your own dear lips what the trouble was. Now tell me all about it. Can I smoke here?

[Takes cigarette and lights.

Laura. Yes.

Elfie. Have one?

[Offers case.

Laura. No, thank you.

Elfie. [Making herself comfortable.] Now go ahead. Tell me all the scandal. I'm just crazy to know.

Laura. [Going over and sitting in a chair.] There's nothing to tell, I haven't been able to find work, that is all, and I'm short of money. You can't live in hotels, you know, with cabs and all that sort of thing, when you're not working.

Elfie. Yes you can. I haven't worked in a year.

Laura. But you don't understand, dear, I—I—well you know I—well you know, I can't say what I want.

Elfie. Oh, yes you can, we've been pals. I know you got along a little faster in the business than I did. The chorus was my limit, and you went into the legitimate thing. We lived just the same, though. I didn't suppose there was any secret between you and me about that.

Laura. Elfie, I know there wasn't, but I tell you I'm different now, I don't want to do that sort of thing, and I've been very unlucky. This has been a terribly hard season for me. I simply haven't been able to get an engagement.

Elfie. Well, you can't get on this way. Won't Brockton help you out!

Laura. What's the use of talking to you, Elfie, you don't understand.

[Gets up and goes up stage looking out of window.

Elfie. [Puffing deliberately on cigarette and crossing her legs in almost a masculine attitude.] Why don't I understand?

Laura. Because you can't, you've never felt as I have.

Elfie. How do you know?

Laura. [*Turning impatiently.*] Oh, what's the use of explaining?

Elfie. You know, Laura, I'm not much on giving advice, but you make me sick. I thought you'd grown wise, a young girl just butting into this business might possibly make a fool of herself, but when you've reached our age you ought to be on to the game and make the best of it.

Laura. [*Going over to her angrily.*] If you come up here, Elfie, to talk that sort of stuff to me, please don't. I was West this summer—I met some one—some one who did me a whole lot of good—some one who opened my eyes to a different way of going along—some one who—oh well, what's the use—you don't know.

Elfie. I don't know, don't I? I don't know, I suppose I came to this town from up state, a little burgh named Oswego, and joined a chorus that I didn't fall in love with just such a man. I suppose I don't know that then I was the best looking girl in New York, and everybody talked about me—I suppose I don't know that there were men, all ages and with all kinds of money ready to give me anything for the mere privilege of taking me out to supper, and I didn't do it, did I? I stuck by this good man, who was to lead me in a good way toward a good life, for three years, and I was getting older all the time, never quite so pretty one day as I had been the day before, and I never knew then what it was to be tinkered with by a hairdresser and a manicure, or a hundred and one of those other people who help you look pretty. I didn't have to have them then. Well, you know, Laura, what happened.

Laura. Wasn't it partly your fault, Elfie?

Elfie. Was it my fault that time made me older and I took on a lot of flesh? Was it my fault? Was it my fault that the work and the life took out the color and left the make up? Was it my fault that other pretty young girls came along, just as I'd come, and were chased after just as I was? Was it my fault the cabs weren't waiting any more and people didn't talk about how pretty I was? Was it my fault when he finally had me alone, and just because no one else wanted me he got tired and threw me flat—cold flat—and I'd been dead on the level with him. [*With almost a sob.*] It almost broke my heart. Then I made up my mind to get even and get all I could out of the game. Jerry came along. He was a has-been and I was on the road that way. He wanted to be good to me and I let him. That's all.

Laura. I don't see how you can live that way.

Elfie. You did and you didn't kick.

Laura. But it's different now with me. You'd be the same way if you were in my place.

Elfie. No. I've had all the romance I want, and I'll stake you to all your love affairs. I am out to gather in as much coin as I

can in my own way, so when the old rainy day comes along I'll have a little change for an umbrella.

Laura. [*Rising and angry.*] What did you come here for? Why can't you leave me alone when I'm trying to get along.

Elfie. Because I want to help you.

Laura. You can't help me. I'm all right—I tell you I am—what do you care anyway

Elfie. But I do care. I know how you feel with an old cat for a landlady and living up here on a side street with a lot of cheap burlesque people. Why the room's cold, and there's no hot water, and you're beginning to look shabby. You haven't got a job, chances are you won't have one. What does this fellow out there do for you? Send you long letters of condolence? That's what I used to get. When I wanted to buy a new pair of shoes or a silk petticoat, he told me how much he loved me, so I had the other ones resoled and turned the old petticoat, and look at you, you're beginning to show it. [*She surveys her carefully.*] I do believe there are lines coming in your face, and you hide in the house because you've nothing new to wear.

Laura. But I've got what you haven't got. I may have to hide my clothes, but I don't have to hide my face. And you with that man—he's old enough to be your father—a toddling dote hanging on your apron strings. I don't see how you dare show your face to a decent woman.

Elfie. You don't—but you did once and I never caught you hanging your head. You say he's old—I know he's old—but he's good to me. He's making what's left of my life pleasant and he don't worry me. You think I like him—I don't—sometimes I hate him, but he understands and you can bet your life his check is in my mail bag every Saturday night or there's a new lock on the door Sunday morning.

Laura. How can you say such things to me?

Elfie. Because I want you to be square with yourself. You've lost all that precious virtue women gad about. When you've got the name, I say get the game.

Laura. You can go now, Elfie. Don't come back.

Elfie. [*Rising.*] All right, if that's the way you want it to be, I'm sorry. [*A knock on the door.*]

Laura. [*Controlling herself after a moment's hesitation.*] Come in.

[*ANNIE enters with a note, crosses and hands it to LAURA.*]

Annie. Mrs. Farley sent this, Miss Laura.

[*LAURA takes the note and reads it. She is palpably annoyed.*]

Laura. There's no answer.

Annie. She tol' me not to leave until I got an answer.

Laura. You must ask her to wait.

Annie. She wants an answer.

Laura. Tell her I'll be right down—that it will be all right.

Annie. Yessum.

[Exits.]

Laura. [*Half to herself and half to ELFIE.*] She's taking advantage of your being here.

Elfie. How?

Laura. She wants money—three weeks' room rent. I presume she thought you'd give it to me.

Elfie. Huh!

Laura. Elfie, I've been a little cross; I didn't mean it.

Elfie. Well?

Laura. Could—could you lend me thirty-five dollars until I get to work?

Elfie. Me?

Laura. Yes.

Elfie. Lend *you* thirty-five dollars?

Laura. Yes—just until I get to work.

Elfie. So that's the kind of woman you are, eh? A moment ago you were to going to kick me out of the place because I wasn't decent enough to associate with you. You know how I live. You know how I get my money—the same way you got most of yours. And now that you've got this spasm of goodness I'm not fit to be in your room; but you'll take my money to pay your debts. You'll let me go out and do this sort of thing for your benefit while you try to play the grand lady. I've got your number now, Laura. where in hell is your virtue anyway, and as far as I'm concerned, you can go to the devil rich, poor or any other way. I'm off!

[*ELFIE rushes toward door; for a moment LAURA stands speechless, then bursts into hysterics.*]

Laura. Elfie! Elfie! Don't go now. Don't leave me now! I can't stand it. I can't be alone. Don't go, please; don't go.

[*LAURA falls into Elfie's arms sobbing. In a moment ELFIE'S whole demeanor changes and she melts into the tenderest womanly sympathy trying her best to express herself in her crude way.*]

Elfie. There, old girl. don't cry, don't cry. You just sit down here and put your arms around me; I'm awful sorry. On the level I am. I shouldn't have said it. I know that. But I've got feelings too, even if folks don't give me credit for it.

Laura. I know, Elfie. I've gone through about all I can stand.

Elfie. Well, I should say you have—and more than I would. Anyway a good cry never hurts any woman. I have one myself,

sometimes—under cover.

Laura. [*More seriously, recovering herself.*] Perhaps what you said was true.

Elfie. We won't talk about it.

Laura. [*With persistence.*] But perhaps it was true, and, *Elfie*—

Elfie. Yes.

Laura. I think I've stood this just as long as I can. Every day is a living horror.

Elfie. It's the limit.

Laura. I've got to have money to pay the rent. I've pawned everything I have that is worth a cent, except the clothes to keep me warm.

Elfie. I'll give you all the money you need, dearie. Don't you care if I've got sore and—and lost my head.

Laura. No. I can't let you do that. You may have been mad—awfully mad, but what you said was the truth—I can't take your money.

Elfie. Oh, forget that.

Laura. Maybe—maybe if he knew all about it—the suffering—he wouldn't blame me.

Elfie. Who—the good man who wanted to lead you to the good life without even a bread basket for an advance agent. Huh!

Laura. Still he doesn't know how desperately poor I am.

Elfie. He knows you're out of work, don't he?

Laura. Yes.

Elfie. And that nothing's coming in, and all going out

Laura. Yes.

Elfie. Has he sent you anything?

Laura. He hasn't anything to send.

Elfie. Well, what does he think you're going to live on. Asphalt croquettes with conversation sauce?

Laura. I don't know.

Elfie. Don't be a fool, dearie. You know there is somebody waiting for you—somebody who'll be good to you and get you out of this mess.

Laura. You mean Will Brockton?

Elfie. Yes.

Laura. Do you know where he is?

Elfie. Yes.

Laura. Will?

Elfie. You won't get sore if I tell you?

Laura. No, why.

Elfie. He's down stairs—waiting in the car. I promised to tell him what you said.

Laura. Then it was all planned and—and——

Elfie. Now, dearie, I knew you were up against it, and I wanted to bring you together. He's got half of the Burgess shows and if you'll only see him everything will be fixed.

Laura. When does he want to see me?

Elfie. Now.

Laura. Here?

Elfie. Yes. Shall I tell him to come up?

Laura. [*After a long pause.*] Yes.

Elfie. [*Suddenly becomes animated.*] Now you're a sensible dear. I'll bet he's half frozen down there. [*Goes to door.*] I'll send him up, and wash your eyes, dearie. [*Goes to ent.*] Say, listen, dearie, tell him he'll have to blow us all to dinner at Rector's—understand—seven thirty—I'll be there, so long. [*She exits.*

[*There is a moment's wait, and LAURA then busies herself with her personal appearance. Before the mirror she fixes her hair, applies the powder rag and then, her appearance evidently satisfying her, she takes a seat and awaits Brockton's arrival. His heavy step is heard upon the stairway and then his knock.*]

Laura. Come in.

[*BROCKTON enters. His dress is that of a man of business; the time being about November. He is well groomed and brings with him the impression of easy luxury.*]

Brockton. [*As he enters.*] Hello, Laura.

[*There is an obvious embarrassment on the part of each of them. She rises, goes to him and extends her hand.*]

Laura. I'm—I'm glad to see you, Will.

Brockton. Thank you.

Laura. Won't you sit down?

Brockton. [*Regaining his ease of manner.*] Thank you, again.
[*Both are seated.*]

Laura. It's rather cold out, isn't it?

Brockton. Just a bit sharp.

Laura. You came with Elfie in the car?

Brockton. She picked me up at Martin's; we lunched there.

Laura. By appointment?

Brockton. I'd asked her.

Laura. Well?

Brockton. Well, Laura.

Laura. She told you?

Brockton. Not a great deal. What do you want to tell me?

Laura. [*Very simply and averting his glance.*] I'm ready to

come back, Will.

Brockton. [*With an effort concealing his sense of triumph and satisfaction.*] I'm mighty glad of that, Laura. I've missed you like the very devil.

Laura. Do we—do we have to talk it over much?

Brockton. Not at all unless you want to. I understand—in fact I always have.

Laura. [*Wearily.*] Yes, I guess you always did. I didn't.

Brockton. It will be just the same as it was before, you know.

Laura. Yes.

Brockton. I didn't think it was possible for me to miss anyone the way I have you. I've been lonely.

Laura. That's nice in you to say that.

Brockton. You'll have to move out of here right away. This place is enough to give one the colly wabbles. If you'll be ready to-morrow I'll send my man over to help you take care of the luggage.

Laura. To-morrow will be all right, thank you.

Brockton. And you'll need some money in the meantime. I'll leave this here.

[*He takes a roll of bills and places it on the desk.*]

Laura. You seem to have come prepared. Did Elfie and you plan this all out?

Brockton. Not planned—just hoped. I think you'd better go to some nice hotel now. Later we can arrange.

Laura. Will, we'll always be frank. I said I was ready to go. It's up to you—when and where?

Brockton. The hotel scheme is the best, but Laura—

Laura. Yes?

Brockton. You're quite sure this is in earnest. You don't want to change? You've time enough now.

Laura. I've quite made up my mind. It's final.

Brockton. If you want to work, Burgess has a nice part for you. I'll telephone and arrange if you say so.

Laura. Thanks. Say I'll see him in the morning.

Brockton. And, Laura, you know when we were in Denver, and—

Laura. Please, please, don't speak of it.

Brockton. I'm sorry, but I've got to. I told Madison. [*Laura turns her head.*] Pardon me, but I must do this—that if this time ever came I'd have you write him the truth. Before we go any further I'd like you to do that now.

Laura. Say good-bye?

Brockton. Just that.

Laura. I wouldn't know how to begin.

Brockton. You mean you wouldn't know what to say?

Laura. It will hurt him awfully deeply.

Brockton. It'll be worse if you don't. He'll like you for telling him. It would be honest, and that is what he expects.

Laura. Must I—now?

Brockton. I think you should.

Laura. [*Goes to desk and sits down.*] How shall I begin, Will?

Brockton. Shall I dictate it?

Laura. Will, I'll do just what you say. You're the one to tell me—now.

Brockton. Address it the way you want to. [*She complies.*] I'm going to be pretty brutal. In the long run I think that is best, don't you?

Laura. Go ahead.

Brockton. Ready?

.. *Laura.* Yes.

Brockton. [*Dictating.*] All I have to say can be expressed in one word, "good-bye." I shall not tell you where I've gone, but remind you of what Brockton told you the last time he saw you. He is here now, dictating this letter. What I am doing is voluntary—my own suggestion. Don't grieve. Be happy, successful and live long. Sign it Laura. [*She complies.*] Address it and seal it. [*She complies.*] Shall I mail it?

Laura. No. If you don't mind I'd sooner. It's a sort of a last—last message.

Brockton. [*Rising.*] All right. You're a little upset now and I'm going. We are all to dine at 7 to-night at Delmonico's. There'll be a party. Of course you'll come.

Laura. I don't think I can. You see—

Brockton. I know. I guess there's enough there [*indicating money*] for your immediate needs. Later you can straighten things up. Shall I send the car at 6:30?

Laura. Yes, please.

Brockton. [*Going toward door.*] Good. It will be the first good evening I've had in a long, long time. [*At door.*] You'll be ready?

Laura. Yes.

Brockton. Au revoir.

[*He exits. For a moment LAURA sits silently, and then, merely as a matter of habit, begins the arrangements for her toilet. She stands before the window and begins to take her hair down. She lights the alcohol lamp and mechanically places the curling iron over the flame. There is a knock at the door.*]

Laura. Come in. [*ANNIE enters and stops.*] That you, Annie?

Annie. Yessum.

Laura. Mrs. Farley wants her rent. There is some money on the desk. Take it to her.

[ANNIE goes to the desk, examines the roll of bills and is palpably surprised.]

Annie. They ain't nothin' here, Miss Laura, but five great big one hundred dollar bills.

Laura. Take two, and look in that upper drawer. You'll find some pawn tickets there. [ANNIE complies.]

Annie. Yessum.

Laura. Take the two top ones and go get my lace gown and one of the hats. The ticket is for one hundred and ten dollars. Keep ten for yourself and hurry.

Annie. [*Her astonishment nearly overcoming her.*] Yessum, Miss Laura, yessum. [*She goes toward door and then turns to LAURA, crossing to her.*] I'm so mighty glad you're out o' all yo' trouble, Miss Laura. I says to Miss Farley now——

Laura. [*Snapping her off.*] Don't—don't. Go do as I tell you and mind your business. [ANNIE turns sullenly and walks toward the door. At that moment LAURA'S eye sees the letter, which she has thrown on the dresser.] Wait a minute. I want you to mail a letter. [*By this time her hair is half down, hanging loosely over her shoulders. Her waist is open at the throat, collar off and she has the appearance of a woman's untidiness as she is at that particular stage of her toilet. She glances at the letter long and wistfully and her nerve fails her.*] Never mind. I'll mail it when I go out.

[ANNIE exits. Slowly LAURA puts the letters over the flame of the alcohol lamp and it ignites. As it burns she holds it in her fingers, and when half consumed throws it into the empty fire place. She sits in a chair facing it, her hands clasped in her lap, her hair hanging loosely over her back and shoulders, her eyes silently fixed on the flames. As the last flicker is seen the curtain slowly descends.]

ACT III.

SCENE. *Two months have elapsed. The scene is at BROCKTON'S apartment in a hotel such as is not over-particular concerning the relations of its tenants. There are a number of these hotels throughout the theatre district of New York, and, as a rule, one will find them usually of the same type. The room in which this scene is placed is that of the general living room in one of the handsomest apartments in the building. The prevailing color is green and there is nothing particularly gaudy about the general furnishings. They are in good taste, but without the variety of arrangement and ornamentation which would naturally obtain in a room occupied by people a bit more particular concerning their surroundings. Down stage and just R of C is a table about three feet square which can be used not only as a general centre-table, but also for service while the occupants are eating. There is a chair on either side of this, and at R, is a conventional hotel fireplace. Going up stage the room turns a sharp angle of about 45 degrees from two to three, and this space is largely taken up by a large doorway, such as is closed by sliding doors, and this hung with green portieres, handsome and in harmony with the general scheme of furnishing of the room. This entrance is presumably to the sleeping-room of the apartment. At back of stage is a bay window or alcove, the lower windows of which are of French glass, and the upper in plain glass. This view shows snow-covered roofs and chimneys of New York. There is a window seat running around it piled up with cushions typical of the general character of the room, and other green portieres also conceal this alcove from the main room. To the L of the doorway and up stage against the black wall is a piano with pianola attachment; to the R of this is a small writing desk. This must be equipped with a small, practical drawer, as the ordinary woman's writing desk—it is necessary that it should be practicable. Down L is the entrance to the corridor of the hotel, and this must be so arranged that it works with a latch-key and opens on to a small hallway which separates this apartment from the main hallway. At left of C is a sort of tete-a-tete and there is a general arrangement of chairs without overcrowding the apartment. Where the R portiere is hung, which can be made to conceal the bay window, is a long, full-length mirror, such as women usually have to dress by.*

AT RISE. *When the curtain rises on this scene it is noticeable that the occupants of the room must have returned rather late at night, after having dined, not wisely, but too well. In the al-*

cove is a man's dresscoat and vest thrown on the cushions in a most careless manner, a silk hat badly rumpled is near it. Over the top of the writing desk is an opera cloak, and hung on the mirror is a huge hat, of the evening type, such as women would pay handsomely for. A pair of gloves are thrown on top of the mantle piece, over the fireplace. The curtains in the bay window are half-drawn, and the light shades are half-drawn down the windows, so that when the curtain goes up the place is in a rather dim light. On the table are the remains of a breakfast, which is served in a box-like arrangement, such as is used in hotels. LAURA is discovered sitting at R of table. Her hair a bit untidy. She has on a very expensive negligee gown. WILL, in a business suit, is at the other side of the table, and both have evidently just about concluded their breakfast and are reading the newspapers while they sip their coffee. LAURA is intent in the scanning of her Morning Telegraph, while WILL is deep in the market reports of the Journal of Commerce, and in each instance these things must be made apparent. WILL throws down the paper rather impatiently.

Will. Have you seen the Sun, Laura?

Laura. No.

Will. Where is it?

Laura. I don't know.

Will. [*In a loud voice.*] Annie, Annie! [*A pause.*] Annie! [*In an undertone, half directed to LAURA.*] Where the devil is that nigger?

Laura. Why, I suppose she's at breakfast.

Will. Well, she ought to be here.

Laura. Did it ever occur to you that she has got to eat just the same as you have?

Will. She's your servant, isn't she?

Laura. My maid.

Will. Well, what have you got her for, to eat or to wait on you? Annie!

Laura. Don't be so cross, what do you want?

Will. I want the Sun.

Laura. I will get it for you.

[*Rather wearily she gets up and goes to the bookcase where there are other morning papers, she takes the Sun, hands it to him, goes back to her seat, re-opens the Morning Telegraph. There is a pause. Annie enters from the sleeping-room up R.*]

Annie. Do you want me, sir?

Will. Yes, I wanted you, but don't now. When I'm at home I have a man to look after me and I get what I want.

Laura. For Heaven's sake, Will, have a little patience. If you like your man so well you had better live at home, but don't come around here with a grouch and bulldoze everybody.

Will. Don't think for a moment that there's much to come around here for. This room's stuffy, Annie.

Annie. Yes, sir.

Will. Draw those portieres. Let those curtains up. Let's have a little light. Take away these clothes and hide them. Don't you know that a man doesn't want to see the next morning anything to remind him of the night before. Make the place look a little respectable.

[In the meantime ANNIE scurries around, picking up the coat and vest, opera cloak, etc., as rapidly as possible and throwing them over her arm without any idea of order. It is very apparent that she is rather fearful of the anger of WILL while he is in this mood.]

Will. *[Looking at her.]* Be careful, you're not taking the wash off the line.

Annie. Yes, sir.

[She exits in confusion up R.]

Laura. *[Laying down paper and looking at WILL.]* Well, I must say you're rather amiable this morning.

Will. I feel like hell.

Laura. Market unsatisfactory?

Will. No; head too big. *[He lights a cigar, as he takes a puff he makes an awful face.]* Tastes like punk.

Laura. You drank a lot.

Will. We'll have to cut out those parties. I can't do those things any more. I'm not as young as I was, and in the morning it makes me sick. How do you feel?

Laura. A little tired, that's all.

Will. You didn't touch anything?

Laura. No.

Will. I guess you're on the safe side. It was a great old party, though, wasn't it?

Laura. Did you think so?

Will. Oh, for that sort of a blowout. Not too rough, but just a little easy. I like them at night and I hate them in the morning. *[He picks up the paper and commences to glance it over in a casual manner, not interrupting his conversation.]* Were you bored?

Laura. Yes. Always at things like that.

Will. Well, you don't have to go

Laura. You asked me.

Will. Still, you could say no.

Laura. *[Getting up and going up stage.]* But you asked me.

Will. What did you go for if you didn't want to?

Laura. You wanted me to.

Will. I don't quite get you.

Laura. Well, Will, you have all my time when I'm not working in the theatre, and you can do with it just what you please. You pay for it. I'm working for you.

Will. Is that all I've got, just your time?

Laura. [*Wearily.*] That and the rest—I guess you know.

Will. [*Looking at her curiously.*] Down in the mouth, eh? I'm sorry.

Laura. No, only if you want me to be frank I'm a little tired. You may not believe it, but I work awfully hard over at the theatre. Burgess will tell you that. I know I'm not so very good as an actress, but I try to be. I'd like to succeed myself. They're very patient with me, of course they've got to be, that's another thing you're paying for, but I don't seem to get along except this way.

Will. Oh, don't get sentimental. If you're going to bring up that sort of talk, Laura, do it some time when I've got a different taste in my mouth, and then don't forget talk never does count for much.

LAURA turns around and looks at him steadfastly for a minute. During this entire scene, from the time the curtain rises she must in a way indicate a premonition of an approaching catastrophe, a feeling, vague, but nevertheless palpable that something is going to happen. She must hold this before her audience so that she can show to them without showing to him the disgust she feels. LAURA has tasted of the privations of self-sacrifice during her struggle, and she has weakly surrendered and is unable to go back, but that brief period of self-abnegation has shown to her most clearly the rottenness of the other sort of living. There is enough sentimentality and emotion in her character to make it impossible for her to accept this manner of existence as Elsie does. Hers is not a nature of careless candor, but of dreamy ideals and better living, warped, handicapped, disillusioned and destroyed by a weakness that finds its centrifugal force in vanity.

WILL resumes his newspaper in a more attentive way. The girl looks at him and expresses in pantomime by the slightest gesture or shrug of the shoulders her growing distaste for him and his way of living, she slowly comes back to her seat. In the meantime WILL is reading the paper rather carefully. He stops suddenly and then looks at his watch.

Laura. What time is it?

Will. After ten.

Laura. Oh.

WILL at this moment he particularly reads some part of the paper,

turns to her with a keen glance of suspicion and inquiry and then for a very short moment evidently settles in his mind a cross-examination. He has read in this paper a despatch from Chicago, which speaks of JOHN MADISON having arrived there as a representative of a big Western mining syndicate which is going to open large operations in the Nevada goldfields, and representing MR. MADISON as being on his way to New York with sufficient capital to enlist more, and showing him to be now a man of means. The attitude of LAURA and the coincidence of the despatch bring back to WILL the scene in Denver, and later in New York, and with that subtle, intuition of the man of the world he connects the two

Will. I don't suppose, Laura, that you'd be interested now in knowing anything about that young fellow out in Colorado? What was his name—Madison.

Laura. Do you know anything?

Will. No, nothing particularly. I've been rather curious to know how he came out. He was a pretty fresh young man, and did an awful lot of talking. I'd like to know what he's doing and how he's getting along. I don't suppose by any chance, you have ever heard from him?

Laura. No, no; I've never heard.

Will. I presume he never replied to that letter you wrote?

Laura. No.

Will. It would be rather queer, eh, if this young fellow should happen to come across a lot of money—not that I think he ever could, but it would be funny, wouldn't it?

Laura. Yes, yes, it would be unexpected, I hope he does. It might make him happy.

Will. Think he might take a trip East and see you act. You know you've got quite a part now.

Laura. [*Impatiently.*] I wish you wouldn't discuss this. Why do you mention it now? Is it because you were drinking last night and lost your sense of delicacy. You once had some consideration for me. What I've done I've done. I'm giving you all that I can. Please, please don't hurt me any more than you can help. That's all I ask.

Will. Well, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that, Laura. I guess I am feeling a little bad to-day. Really I don't want to hurt your feelings, my dear.

[*He gets up, goes to her, puts his hands on her shoulders, and his cheek close to the back of her head. She tries hard not to shrink and shudder a little bit. It is very easy to see that the life she is leading is becoming intolerable to her.*]

Will. You know, dearie, I do a lot for you because you've always been on the level with me. I'm sorry I hurt you, but there was too much wine last night and my stomach's all upset. Forgive me.

[*LAURA, in order to avoid his caresses, has leaned forward, her hands are clasped between her knees and she is looking straight outward with a cold, impassive expression. WILL regards her silently for a moment. Really in the man's heart there is an affection, and really he wants to try to comfort her, but he seems to realize that she has slipped away from the old environment and conditions, and that he simply bought her back; that he hasn't any of her affection even with his money, that she evinces toward him none of the old camaraderie, and it hurts him, as those things always hurt a selfish man, inclining him to be brutal and inconsiderate. They hold this position for just a moment and the doorbell rings. WILL seizes upon this excuse to go up stage and over towards the door. ANNIE appears at the portiere from the sleeping room.*

Will. Never mind, Annie, I'll answer

[*He continues on his way, he opens the door, leaves it open and passes on to the outer door which he opens. LAURA remains immovable and impassive with the same cold, hard expression on her face. He comes in slamming the outer door with effect, which one must have at this point of the play, because it is essential to a situation coming later. Enters the room, closes the door and holds in his hand a telegram.*]

Will. A wire.

Laura. For me?

Will. [Crossing to her.] Yes.

Laura. From whom, I wonder. Perhaps Elfie with a luncheon engagement.

Will. [Handing to her.] I don't know. Here. [Hands it to her. She arises and he faces her. She with her back to the audience, and he looking at her. She opens it quickly, just as he turns to go away, his back is to her, she reads it and as she does, gasps quickly with an exclamation of fear and surprise. This is what the dispatch says. It is dated at Buffalo and addressed to LAURA:]

"I will be in New York before noon. I'm coming to marry you and I'm coming with a bankroll. I wanted to keep it secret and have a big surprise for you, but I can't hold it any longer, because I feel just like a kid with a new top. Don't go out and be ready

for the big matrimonial king. All my love. John."

Will. [*Turns, faces LAURA'S evident confusion.*] No bad news I hope?

Laura. [*Walking up stage rather hurriedly.*] No, no, not bad news.

Will. I thought you were startled.

Laura. No, not at all.

Will. [*Picking up the paper and looking at it about where he had left off.*] From Elfie?

Laura. No, just a friend.

Will. Oh!

[*He makes himself rather comfortable in the chair and LAURA regards him for a moment from up stage as if trying to figure out how to get rid of him.*]

Laura. Won't you be rather late getting down town, Will?

Will. Doesn't make any difference, I don't feel much like the office now. Thought I might order the car and take a spin through the park. The cold air will do me a lot of good. Like to go?

Laura. No, not to-day. I thought your business was important; you said so last night.

Will. No hurry. Do you—er—want to get rid of me?

Laura. Why should I?

Will. Expecting some one?

Laura. No—not exactly

Will. If you don't mind, I think I'll stay here for a while until I feel better.

Laura. Just as you please. [*A pause.*] Will?

Will. Yes.

Laura. How long does it take to come from Buffalo?

Will. Depends on the train you take.

Laura. About how long?

Will. Between eight and ten hours. I think. Expecting some one?

Laura. No, not exactly. Do you know anything about the trains?

Will. Not much, but you could find out. Why don't you have Annie get the time table?

Laura. I will. Annie! Annie!

[*ANNIE appears at doorway.*]

Annie. Yes'm.

Laura. Go ask one of the hall boys to bring me a New York Central time table.

Annie. Yes'm.

[*Crosses the stage and exits through door. LAURA goes up stage and looks out of window.*]

Will. Then you *do* expect some one, eh?

Laura. Only one of the girls who used to be in the same com-

pany with me, but I'm not sure that she's coming here.

Will. Then the wire was from her?

Laura. Yes.

Will. Did she say what train she was on?

Laura. No.

Will. Well, there are a lot of trains. What time did you expect her in?

Laura. She didn't say.

Will. Do I know her?

Laura. I think not, I met her while I was West—when I worked in San Francisco.

Will. Oh!

[*Resumes his paper.*

[*ANNIE re-enters with a time table and hands it to LAURA.*]

Laura. Thanks, take those breakfast things away, Annie.

[*Annie complies; takes them across stage, opens the door leading to the corridor, puts them outside, returns, rings the bell, the button of which is right next to the doorway, and then exits, returning to the sleeping-room. LAURA in the meantime is studying the time table.*

Laura. I can't make this out.

Will. Give it here, maybe I can help you.

[*LAURA goes down stage and sits in the chair opposite WILL, and hands him the time table. He takes it and handles it as if he were familiar with it.*]

Will. Where is she coming from?

Laura. The West; the telegram was from Buffalo, I suppose she was on her way when she sent it.

Will. There's a train comes in here at 10:52 on the Central. That's the Chicago Limited, and there's another train at 3:30 and one at 4:00 and 5:00, and one at 5:30, and from the West, and all pass through Buffalo. Did you think about meeting her?

Laura. No. She'll come here when she arrives.

Will. Knows where you live?

Laura. She has the address.

Will. Ever been to New York before?

Laura. I think not.

Will. [Passing her the time table.] Well, that's the best I can do for you.

Laura. Thank you.

Will. [*Takes up the paper again. LAURA looks at her watch and then at WILL, then rises and goes up stage again extremely nervous and confused.*] By George, this is funny.

Laura. What?

Will. Speak of the devil, you know.

Laura. Who?

Will. Your old friend Madison.

Laura. [*Utters a slight exclamation and makes an effort to control herself.*] What—what about him?

Will. He's been in Chicago.

Laura. How do you know?

Will. Here's a despatch about him.

Laura. [*Coming quickly over to him, looking over his shoulder.*] What—where—what's it about?

Will. Well, I'm damned if he hasn't done what he said he'd do; see. [*Holds the paper so that she can see.*] Here's an interview with him. He's been in Chicago and is evidently on his way to New York in the interest of a large mining concern somewhere in Nevada. Judging from this he must have been able to make that money I spoke to him about. He's coming on here for capital; represented in this despatch as being one of the five owners of the new property which is considered very rich. Did you know anything about it?

Laura. No, no, nothing at all.

Will. Lucky for him, eh?

Laura. Yes, yes, it's very nice.

Will. Too bad he couldn't get this a little sooner, eh, Laura?

Laura. Oh, I don't know, I don't think it's too bad. What makes you ask?

Will. Oh nothing. I suppose he ought to be here to-day. Are you going to see him if he looks you up?

Laura. No, no; I don't want to see him. You know that, don't you, that I don't want to see him? What makes you ask these questions?

Will. Just thought you might meet him, that's all. Don't get sore about it.

Laura. I'm not.

[*She holds the telegram crumpled in one hand and comes down and takes the seat opposite to him. WILL lays down the paper, carelessly throws his cigar across the table and into the empty fireplace, lights a fresh one and regards LAURA curiously. She sees the expression on his face and averts her head in order not to meet his eye.*]

Laura. What are you looking at me that way for?

Will. I wasn't conscious that I was looking at you in any particular way, why?

Laura. Oh, nothing, I guess I'm nervous, too.

Will. I daresay you are.

[*A pause.*]

Laura. Yes. I am.

Will. You know I don't want to take up a lot of old memories and things at this time, but I've got to talk to you for a moment.

Laura. Why don't you do it some other time. I don't want to be talked to now.

Will. But I've got to do it just the same.

Laura. [*Trying to effect an attitude of resigned patience and resignation.*] Well, what is it?

Will. You've always been on the square with me, Laura. That's why I've liked you a lot better than the other women. We never deceived ourselves for a moment, did we?

Laura. Are you going into all that again now, this morning. I thought we understood each other.

Will. So did I, but somehow I think that maybe we *don't* quite understand each other.

Laura. In what way?

Will. [*Slowly turning to her, looking her straight in the eye.*] That letter I dictated to you the day that you came back to me, and left it for you to mail. Did you mail it?

Laura. Yes.

Will. You're quite sure?

Laura. Yes, I'm quite sure. I wouldn't say so if I wasn't.

Will. And you didn't know Madison was coming East before I read of it aloud from this newspaper?

Laura. No—no, I didn't know.

Will. Have you heard from him?

Laura. No—no—I haven't heard from him. Don't talk to me about this thing. Why can't you leave me alone? I'm miserable enough as it is.

Will. I'm sorry, but I've got to talk to you. Laura you're lying to me.

Laura. What!

[*She makes a valiant effort to become angry.*]

Will. You're lying to me, and you've been lying to me, and I've trusted you. Show me that telegram!

Laura. No.

Will. [*Rises, going over towards her.*] Show me that telegram!

Laura. You've no right to ask me.

Will. Are you going to make me take it away from you? I've never laid my hands on you yet.

Laura. It's my business.

Will. Yes, and it's mine. [*She rises and they confront each other.*] From the day you first came into my life, and I took care of you to the time when you left, and then came back again, I've been on the level with you and never told you a lie, and I trusted you—of all

the women I knew I trusted you and you lied to me. Don't try to tell me anything different. That telegram's from Madison. Give it here!

Laura. What—what do you want it for?

Will. Give it to me. I'm going to find out where I stand and what you have made me do. Come, don't make me take it, but understand, if I have to I will.

[There is a moment of hesitancy, the woman looks at the man almost with defiance, but his domination slowly gains the ascendancy and her knowledge of guilt weakens her, her whole being seems to suddenly become unhinged and she holds out the telegram to him reluctantly, but almost frightened. He takes it very slowly, looking her squarely in the eye, and does not glance away while he slowly smoothes it out so that it can be read, when he finally takes it in both hands to read it she staggers back a step or two and weakly puts one hand on the mantelpiece for support.]

Will. Thank you. *[Then reads the telegram aloud.]* "I will be in New York before noon. I'm coming to marry you, and I'm coming with a bankroll. I wanted to keep it a secret and have a big surprise for you, but I can't hold it any longer, because I feel just like a kid with a new top. Don't go out and be ready for the big matrimonial thing. All my love. John." *[A pause.]* Then you knew of his good luck?

Laura. Yes.

Will. But you didn't know he was coming until this arrived?

Laura. No.

Will. And you didn't mail the letter, did you?

Laura. No.

Will. What did you do with it?

Laura. I—I burned it.

Will. Why? *[LAURA is completely overcome and unable to answer.]*

Will. Why?

Laura. I—I couldn't help it—I simply couldn't help it.

Will. And he doesn't know—*[With a gesture around the room indicating the condition in which they live.]* about this?

Laura. No.

Will. *[Taking a step towards her.]* By God, I never beat a woman in my life, but I feel as though I could wring your neck.

Laura. Why don't you? You've done everything else. Why don't you?

Will. Don't you know that I gave Madison my word that if you came back to me I'd let him know—don't you know that I like that

young fellow and I wanted to protect him, and did everything I could to help him—and do you know what you've done to me—you've made me out a liar—you've made me lie to a man—a man—you understand? What are you going to do now? Tell me—what are you going to do now? Don't stand there as if you've lost your voice—how are you going to square me?

Laura. I'm not thinking about squaring you. What am I going to do for him?

Will. Not, what you are going to do for him—what am I going to do for him. Why I couldn't have that young fellow think that I tricked him into this thing for you or all the rest of the women of your kind on earth. God! I might have known that you and the others like you couldn't be square. [*The GIRL looks at him dumbly. He glances at his watch, walks up stage, looks out of the window, comes down again, goes to the table and looks at her across it.*] You've made a nice mess of it, haven't you?

Laura. [*Weakly.*] There isn't any mess. Please go away. He'll be here soon—please let *me* see him—please do that.

Will. No, I'll wait—I'm a little late, that's true, but this time I'm going to tell him myself and I don't care how tough it is

Laura. [*Immediately regaining all her vitality and leaning on the table toward him.*] No, you musn't do it.

Laura. No. Oh, Will, I'm not offering any excuse. I'm not saying anything, but I'm telling you the truth. I couldn't give him up—I couldn't do it—I love him. Don't you think so? I know you can't see what I see, but I do. And why can't you go away. Why can't you leave me this. It's all I ever had. He doesn't know. No one will ever tell him. I'll take him away—it's the best for him—it's the best for me. Please go.

Will. Why—do you think that I'm going to let you trip him the way you tripped me. I don't know why I ever thought you were an exception, but I did. There are no illusions about me, *Laura*. I know, because I lived close to all this thing, but he doesn't. I'm going to stay right here until that young man arrives and I'm going to tell him that it wasn't my fault he's been stung the way he has. I wanted to do right. You were to blame.

Laura. Then you are going to let him know. You're not going to give me a single, solitary chance?

Will. I'll give you every chance that you deserve when he knows. Then he can do as he pleases, but there must be no more deception, that's flat.

Laura. Then you must let me tell him—yes you must—if I didn't tell him before I'll do it now. You must go. If you ever had any regard for me—if you ever had any affection—if you ever had any friendship, please let me do this now. I want you to go—you can

come back. Then you'll see—you'll know—only I want to try to make him understand that—that maybe if I am weak I'm not vicious—I want to let him know that I didn't want to do it, but I couldn't help it. Just give me the chance to be as good as I can be—oh, I promise you. Will, I'll tell him and then—then I don't care what happens—only he must learn everything from me—please—please—let me do this—it's the last favor I shall ever—ever ask of you. Won't you?

Will. [*Rising, looks at her a moment as if mentally debating the best thing to do.*] All right, I won't be unkind. But just remember this, this is the time you'll have to go right through to the end. I'll be back early in the afternoon, and then unless you've carried out my promise to him in every detail, I'll have to do the thing myself—when that's done we can talk about the future, but remember this is the thing you must do now. Understand?

Laura. Yes—thank you—I'll do all of it—all of it—won't you—go—now?

Will. All right.

[He exits into the bedroom and immediately enters again with overcoat on his arm and hat in hand, he goes to the door and turns.]

I am sorry for you, Laura, but remember you've got to tell the truth—all of it. I'll be back at between two and three.

Laura. [*Who is sitting in a chair looking straight in front of her with a set expression.*] Please go. *He exits.*

LAURA sits in a chair in a state of almost stupefaction, holding this attitude as long as possible. *ANNIE* enters up *R* through the portiercs and in a lazy, characteristic manner begins her task of tidying up the room. *LAURA*, without changing her attitude and staring straight in front of her, her elbows between her knees and her chin on her hands.

Laura. Annie!

Annie. Yes'm.

Laura. Do you remember in the boarding house—when we finally packed up—what you did with everything?

Annie. Yes.

Laura. You remember that in my top chiffonier drawer I used to keep a pistol?

Annie. You all mean that little black one you say that gentleman out West gave you once?

Laura. Yes.

Annie. Yes'm, I remember it.

Laura. Where is it now?

Annie. [*Xes to writing desk.*] Last I saw of it was in this here drawer in the writing desk. [*This speech takes her across to desk,*

she opens the drawer, fumbles among a lot of old papers, letters, etc., and finally produces a small, gunmetal, automatic 32-calibre Colt, and gingerly puts it in her hand.] Is this it?

Laura. [*Slowly turns around and looks at it.*] Yes. Put it back. I thought perhaps it was lost. [*ANNIE complies, Xes over toward the portiere leading into sleeping apartment and is about to exit when the bell rings. LAURA starts suddenly, involuntarily gathering her negligee gown closer to her figure, and at once she is under a great stress of emotion, and sways upon her feet to such an extent that she is obliged to put one hand out onto the table to maintain her balance. When she speaks it is with a certain difficulty of articulation.*] See—who—that is—and let me know.

Annie. [*Turning.*] Yes'm. [*Xes, opens the first door and afterwards opens the second door. Elfie's voice off stage.*] Hello, Annie, folks home?

[*LAURA immediately evidences her tremendous relief, and EFFIE, without waiting for a reply, has shoved ANNIE aside and enters, ANNIE following and closing the door. ELFIE is beautifully gowned in a morning dress with an overabundance of fur trimmings and all the furbelows that would accompany an extravagant raiment generally affected by a woman of that type. ELFIE approaching effusively.*

Elfie. Hello, dearie. My goodness. Don't you ever get dressed? I've been shopping all morning long, just blew myself until I'm broke, that's all. Listen—talk about cinches, I copped out a gown, all ready made, and fits me like the paper on the wall, for \$37.80, looks like it might have cost \$200, anyway I had them charge \$200 on the bill and took the rest. There are two or three more down town there, and I want you to go down and look them over. Models, you know, being sold out. I don't blame you for not getting up earlier. [*She is seated at the table, not noticing LAURA who still stands looking at her.*] That was some party last night. I know you didn't drink a great deal, but gee! didn't Will have an awful little tide on. How do you feel? [*Looks at her critically.*] What's the matter, are you sick? You look all in. What you want to do is this—put on your duds and go out for an hour. It's fine outside, clear and cold. [*A pause.*] Well, much obliged for the conversation. Don't I get a "Good morning," or a "How-de-do," or a something of that sort?

Laura. I'm tired, Elfie, and blue—terribly blue.

Elfie. Well, now, you just brace up and cut all that emotional stuff out. I came down to take you for a drive, to-night you'd like it; just through the park. Will you go?

Laura. [*Going up stage.*] Not this morning, dear, I'm expecting

somebody.

Elfie. A man?

Laura. [*Finding it almost impossible to suppress a smile.*] No, a gentleman.

Elfie. Same thing.. Do I know him?

Laura. You've heard of him.

Elfie. Well, don't be so mysterious who is he?

Laura. What time is it?

Elfie. [*Looks at her watch.*] Five minutes past eleven.

Laura. [*Quickly.*] I didn't know it was so late; just excuse me, won't you, while I get some clothes on. He may be here any moment. [*She goes up stage towards portieres.*]

Elfie. Who?

Laura. I'll tell you when I get dressed. Make yourself at home, won't you, dear?

Elfie. I'd sooner hear. What is the scandal anyway?

Laura. [*Just as she exits.*] I'll tell you in a moment. Just as soon as Annie gets through with me. [*She exits.*]

Elfie. [*Rising and walking to L of stage and in a louder voice.*] Do you know Laura I think I'll go back on the stage.

Laura. [*Off stage.*] Yes?

Elfie. Yes, I'm afraid I'll have to, I think I need a sort of a boost to my popularity.

Laura. How a boost, Elfie?

Elfie. I think Jerry is getting cold feet, he's seeing a little too much of me—you know I mean my company

Laura. What makes you think that?

Elfie. I think he is getting a relapse of that front row habit; there's no use in talking, Laura, it's a great thing for a girl's credit when a man like Jerry can take two or three friends to the theatre and when you make your entrance delicately point to you with his forefinger and say: "That one on the left, she's mine." The old fool's hanging around some of these musical comedies lately, and I'm getting a little nervous every time rent day comes.

Laura. Oh, I guess you'll get along all right, Elfie.

Elfie. [*With serene self-satisfaction.*] Oh, that's a cinch, but I like to leave well enough alone, and if I had to make a change right now it would require a whole lot of thought and attention. [*She sees the pianola.*] Say, dearie, when did you get the hurdy-gurdy? The girl in the flat next to me has got one and it's just a little worse than the phonograph upstairs. [*Wanders over and looks over the rolls on top. Mumbles to herself.*] Tanhauser, William Tell, Chopin. [*Then louder.*] Listen, dear, ain't you got anything else except all this high-brow stuff?

Laura. What do you want?

Elfie. Oh, something with a regular tune to it. Oh, here's one; just watch me tear this off.

[*The roll is the tune of "Bon-Bon Buddie, the Chocolate Drop."* She starts to play and moves the lever marked "Swell" wide open, increases the tempo and is pumping with all the delight and enthusiasm of a child.]

Laura. Gracious, *Elfie*, don't play so loud. What's the matter?

Elfie. I shoved over that thing marked "Swell." [*Stops and turns.*] If they're making these things for me, they can stop right away. Hurry up. [*Laura appears.*] Gee, you look pale. [*And then in a tone of sympathy*] I'll just bet you and Will have had a fight and he always gets the best of you, doesn't he, dearie? Listen. Don't you think you can ever get him trained? I almost threw Jerry down the stairs the other night and he came right back with five dozen American beauties and a check. I told him if he didn't look out I'd throw him downstairs every night. He's getting too damned independent and it's got me nervous. Oh, dear, I s'pose I will have to go back on the stage.

Laura. In the chorus?

Elfie. Well, I should say not. I'm going to give up my musical career; Charlie Burgess is putting on a little play and he says he has a part in it for me if I want to go back. It isn't much, but very important, sort of a pantomime part. A lot of people talk about me and just at the right time I walk across the stage and make an awful hit. I told Jerry about it and I said that if I went on he'd have to come across with one of those Irish crochet lace gowns. He fell for it. Do you know I think it would be a good scheme to take the job just to get the dress.

Laura. [*Seriously.*] *Elfie*?

Elfie. Yes, dear.

Laura. [*Moves down to the chair opposite the table.*] Come over here and sit down.

Elfie. What's up?

Laura. Do you know what I'm going to ask of you?

Elfie. If it's a touch, you'll have to wait until next week.

[*She comes over with this speech and sits opposite Laura.*]

Laura. No; just a little advice.

Elfie. [*With a smile.*] Well, that's cheap, and Lord knows you need it. What's happened?

[*LAURA takes the crumpled telegram that WILL has left on the table and hands it to ELFIE. The latter reads it very carefully and lays it down.*]

Elfie. Well?

Laura. Will suspected, there was something in the paper about

Mr. Madison, the telegram came, then we had a row.

Elfie. Serious?

Laura. Yes. Do you remember what I told you about that letter—the one Will made me write—I mean to John—telling him what I had done?

Elfie. Yes, you burned it.

Laura. I tried to lie to Will; he wouldn't have it that way. He seemed to know. He was furious.

Elfie. Did he hit you?

Laura. No; he made me admit that John didn't know, and then he said he'd stay here and tell himself that I'd made him lie, and then he said something about liking the other man and wanting to save him.

Elfie. Save. Shucks. He's jealous.

Laura. I told him if he'd only go I'd—tell John myself when he came, and now you see I'm waiting—and I've got to tell—and—and I don't know how to begin—and—and I thought you could help me—you seem so sort of resourceful, and it means—it means so much to me. If John turned on me now I couldn't go back to Will, and Elfie,—I don't think I'd care to—to stay here any more.

Elfie. [*Getting up and slowly going around the table, putting her hands on Laura's shoulders.*] Dearie, get that nonsense out of your head and be practical. I'd just like to see any two men who could make me think about—well—what you seem to have in your mind.

Laura. But I don't know, don't you see, Elfie, I don't know—if I don't tell him Will will come back and he'll tell him, and I know John and maybe—Elfie, do you know, I think John would kill him.

Elfie. Well, don't you think anything about that. Now let's get down to cases and we haven't much time. Business is business and love is love. You're long on love and I'm long on business, and between the two of us we ought to straighten this thing out. [*Goes over and sits down opposite her with both hands on the table, all attention, alertness and interest.*] Now, evidently, John is coming on here to marry you.

Laura. Yes.

Elfie. And you love him?

Laura. Yes.

Elfie. And as far as you know the moment that he comes in here it's quick to the justice and a big matrimonial thing.

Laura. Yes, but you see how impossible it is—

Elfie. I don't see anything impossible. From all you've said to me about this fellow there is only one thing to do.

Laura. One thing?

Elfie. Yes—get married quick. You say he has the money and you have the love, and you're sick of Brockton, and you want

to switch and do it in the decent, respectable, conventional way, and he's going to take you away. Haven't you got sense enough to know that once you're married to Mr. Madison that Will Brockton wouldn't dare go to him, and if he did Madison wouldn't believe him.

Laura. [*Turns and looks at her. There is a long pause.*] Elfie, I—I don't think I could do like that to John—I don't think—I could deceive him.

Elfie. You make me sick. The thing to do is to lie to all men; they all lie to you. Protect yourself. You seem to think that your happiness depends on this. Now do it. Listen—don't you realize that you and me and all the girls that are shoved into this life are practically the common prey of any man who happens to come along? Don't you know that they've got about as much consideration for us as they have for any pet animal around the house, and the only way that we've got it on the animal is that we've got brains. This is a game, Laura, not a love affair. Do you suppose this Madison—now don't get sore—hasn't turned these tricks himself before he met you, and I'll gamble he's done it since. A man's natural trade is a heartbreaking business. Don't tell me about women breaking men's hearts. The only thing they can ever break is their bankroll, and besides this is not Will's business, he has no right to interfere. You've been with him—yes—and he's been nice to you, but I don't think that he's given you any the best of it. Now if you want to leave and go your own way and marry any Tom, Dick or Harry that you want, it's nobody's affair but yours.

Laura. But you don't understand; it's John; I can't lie to him.

Elfie. Well, that's too bad about you. I used to have that truthful habit, and the best I ever got was the worst of it. All this talk about love and loyalty and constancy is fine and dandy in a book, but when a girl has to look out for herself, take it from me, whenever you've got that trump card up your sleeve just play it and rake in the pot. [*She rises and goes round the table and puts her arms around Laura, puts her cheek down to Laura's face, and in the tenderest voice.*] You know, dearie, you're just about the only one in the world I love since I broke away from the folks up state and they've heard things; there ain't any more letters coming to me with an Oswego postmark. Ma's gone, and the rest don't care. You're about all I've got in the world, and what I'm asking you to do is because I want to see you happy. I was afraid this thing was coming off and the thing to do now is to grab your happiness no matter how you get it nor where it comes from. There ain't a whole lot of joy in this world for us and the others we know, and what little you get you've got to take when you're

young, because when those gray hairs begin to come, and the make-up isn't going to hide the wrinkles, unless you're well fixed, it's going to be hell. You know, what a fellow doesn't know doesn't hurt him, and he'll love you just the same and you'll love him. As for Brockton, let him get another girl; there're plenty 'round. Why if this chance came to me I'd tie a can to Jerry so quick that you could hear it rattle all the way down Broadway. [*Very tenderly*] Dearie, promise me that you won't be a damn fool.

[*The bell rings; both start.*]

Laura. Maybe that's John.

[*ELFIE brushes a tear quickly from her eye and instinctively for her bag and powders her nose.*]

Elfie. And you'll promise me, Laura?

Laura. I'll try.

[*ANNIE enters up stage from the adjoining room and Xes to the door.*]

If that's Mr. Madison, Annie, tell him to come in.

[*She stands near the table, almost rigid. Instinctively ELFIE goes to the mirror and re-arranges her gown and hair as ANNIE exits.*]

Elfie. If I think he's the fellow when I see him watch me and I'll tip you the wink.

[*She goes up stage to C and turns. LAURA remains in her position. The doors are heard to open and in a moment JOHN enters. He is dressed very neatly in a business suit and his face is tanned and weather-beaten. After he enters he stands still for a moment. The emotion that both he and LAURA go through is such that each is trying to control it. LAURA from the agony of her position and JOHN from the mere hurt of his affection. He sees ELFIE and forces a smile.*]

John. [*Quietly.*] Hello, Laura. I'm on time.

[*LAURA smiles and quickly Xes the stage and holds out her hand.*]

Laura. Oh, John, I'm so glad—so glad to see you.

[*They hold this position for a moment looking into each other's eyes. ELFIE moves so as to take JOHN in from head to toe and is obviously very much pleased with his appearance. She coughs slightly.*]

[*Taking a step back with a smile.*] Oh, pardon me, John, one of my dearest friends, Miss Sinclair; she's heard a lot about you.

[*ELFIE, with a slight gush, in her most captivating manner, goes over and holds out her gloved hand laden*

with braccllets, and with her sweetest smile.]

Elfie. How do you do?

Madison. I'm glad to meet you, I'm sure.

[Still holding JOHN'S hand.]

Elfie. Yes, I'm sure you are—particularly just at this time. *[To LAURA.]* You know that old stuff about two's company and three is a crowd. Mr. Madison, I'm off.

Laura. *[As ELFIE goes toward door.]* Don't hurry, dear.

Elfie. *[With a grin.]* No, I suppose not; just fall downstairs and get out of the way, that's all. Anyway, Mr. Madison, I'm glad to have met you, and I want to congratulate you; they tell me you're rich.

John. Oh, no; not rich.

Elfie. Well, I don't believe you—anyway I'm going—ta, ta—dearie. Good-bye, Mr. Madison.

[She goes to the door, opens it and turns. JOHN'S back is partly toward her and she gives a long wink at LAURA.]

I must say, Laura, then, when it comes to picking them out, you certainly can go some.

[After this remark both turn toward her and both smile. After she leaves, JOHN turns toward LAURA.]

[After ELFIE exits, John turns to LAURA with a pleasant smile and jerks his head towards the door where ELFIE has gone out.]

John. I bet she's a character.

Laura. She's a dear.

John. I can see that all right.

Laura. She's been a very great friend to me.

John. That's good, but I don't get a how-de-do, or a handshake or a little kiss? You know I've come a long ways.

[LAURA goes to him and places herself in his arms; he kisses her affectionately. During all this scene between them the tenderness of the man is very apparent. As she releases herself from his embrace he takes her face in his hands and holds it up towards his.]

John. I'm not much on the lovemaking business, Laura, but I never thought I'd be as happy as I am now. I've been counting mileposts ever since I left Chicago, and it seemed like as if I had to go 'round the world before I got here.

Laura. You never told me about your good fortune. If you hadn't telegraphed I wouldn't even have known you were coming.

John. I didn't want you to.

[He leads her over to the table, and they both sit down]

during this conversation.]

John. I'd made up my mind to sort of drop in here and give you a great big surprise—a happy one I knew—but the papers made such a fuss in Chicago that I thought you might have read about it—did you?

Laura. No.

John. [*With a smile.*] Well are you ready?

Laura. For what, dear?

John. You know what I said in the telegram?

Laura. Yes.

John. Well, I meant it.

Laura. I know.

John. I've got to get back, Laura, just as soon as ever I can. There's a lot of work to be done out in Nevada and I stole away to come to New York. I want to take you back. Can you go?

Laura. Yes. When?

John. This afternoon. We can take the Twentieth Century Limited at half past three, connect at Chicago with the Overland Limited, and I'll soon have you in a home. And here's another secret.

Laura. What, dear?

John. I've got that home all bought and furnished, and while you couldn't call it a Fifth Avenue residence, still it's one of the best in the town.

Laura. But, John, you haven't told me a single, solitary word about yourself, and what you've done, and how your good luck came.

John. I wanted to take you out and show you all that. You know it's been pretty tough sledding out there—in the mining country, and it did look as if I never would make a strike—but you were with me, and luck was with me—and I knew if I could only hold out that something would come my way. I had two pals, both of them miners—they had the knowledge and I had the luck and one day—clearing away a little snow to build a fire—I poked my toe into the dirt and there was somethin' there, dearie, that looked suspicious. I called Jim—that's one of the men—and in less time than it takes to tell you there were three maniacs scratching old Mother Earth for all they were worth. We staked our claims in two weeks, and I came to Reno to raise enough money for me to come East. Now things are all fixed and it's just a matter of time.

Laura. So you're very, very rich, dear?

John. Oh, not rich—just heeled. I'm not going down to the Wall Street bargain counter and buy the Union Pacific, or anything like that—but we won't have to take the trip in on tourists' tickets, and

there's enough money to make us comfortable all the rest of our lives. [*Lightly.*] You see, Laura, you were the inspiration and it was bound to come.

Laura. How hard you must have worked and suffered. It was terrible, wasn't it?

John. No; it was beautiful. Why, dear—— [*He takes her hand and places it against his heart.*] Since the day you came into my life hell raising took a sneak out the back door and God poked His foot in the front, and ever since then I think He's been coming a little closer to me. I used to be a fellow without much faith and scoffed at everybody who had it, and I used to say to those who prayed and believed, "You may be right, but show me a message." You came along and you brought that little document in your sweet face and your dear love. Laura, you turned the trick for me, and I think I'm almost a regular man now.

[*LAURA turns away in pain, the realization of all she is to JOHN weighs heavily upon her. She almost loses her nerve and is on the verge of not going through with her determination to get her happiness at any price.*]

Laura. John, please don't—I'm not worth it.

John. [*With a light air.*] Not worth it? Why you're worth that and a whole lot more, and see how you've got on. I heard all about you. Brockton told me you never could get along in your profession, but I knew you could, I knew what you had in you, and here you are. [*He rises, takes both her hands and looks around the room.*] You see if my foot hadn't slipped on the right ground and kicked up paydirt, you'd been all right. You succeeded and I succeeded, but I'm going to take you away, and after a while when things sort of smooth out and it's all clear where the money's coming from we're going to move back here and go to Europe and just have a great time, like a couple of good pals.

Laura. [*Slowly.*] But if I hadn't succeeded and if things—things weren't just as they seem—would it make any difference to you, John?

John. Not the least in the world. [*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.*] Now don't you get blue. I should not have surprised you this way. It's taken you off your feet. [*He looks at his watch.*] But we've not any time to lose. How soon can you get ready?

Laura. You mean to go?

John. Nothing else.

Laura. Take all my things?

John. All your duds.

Laura. Why, dear, I can get ready most any time

John. I planned it all out. There's a couple of the boys working down town, newspaper men on Park Row, who used to be with me out West. Telephoned them when I got in and they're waiting for me. I'll just get down there as soon as I can, and you and your maid pack everything you want to take. The rest can follow later. I'll get the license. We'll be married and we'll be off on our honeymoon this afternoon. Can you do it?

[*LAURA goes up to him, puts her hands in his and they confront each other.*]

Laura. Yes, dear, I could do anything for you.

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her again. Looks at her tenderly.*]

John. I love you, Laura, and this is the happiest little day I've ever had in my life. [*Disengages her, takes his coat and hat.*] Now I'm off, and you get on the job. I'll arrange for everything but don't you waste a moment, because if we don't catch that train we can't make the Overland in Chicago to-morrow, and we've got to get home. [*Goes toward the door.*] You'll be ready?

Laura. Yes.

John. [*With a smile.*] So long, honey.

Laura. Hurry back, John.

John. Yes.

[*He exits.*]

Laura. [*Stands for a moment looking after him, then she suddenly recovers herself and walks rapidly over to the entrance up R.*] Annie, Annie, come here.

Annie. Yes'm.

[*She appears at the door.*]

Laura. Annie, I'm going away, and I've got to hurry. I want you to bring both my trunks out here. I'll help you and start to pack. We can't take everything, but bring all the clothes out and we'll hurry as fast as we can. Come on.

[*She exits with ANNIE. In a very short interval she reappears and both are carrying a large trunk between them. They put it down up stage.*]

Laura. Let's get the other. I can take two.

Annie. Where are yuh goin', Miss Laura?

Laura. Never mind where I'm going. I haven't any time to waste now talking. I'll tell you later. This is one time, Annie, that you've got to move. Hurry up.

[*LAURA pushes her in front of her. They exit the same way and reappear with a smaller trunk. These trunks are of the same type as those in Act I. When the trunks are put down LAURA opens one and commences to throw things out. ANNIE stands watching her.*]

For Heaven's sake, go get something. Don't stand there look-

ing at me. I want you to hurry.

Annie. Yes'm.

[*She plunges toward the room. LAURA continues busily arranging the contents of the trunk, placing some garments here and some there, as if she were sorting them out. A latch key is heard in the lock, but she does not notice it. WILL quietly enters and stands at the door looking at her. He holds this position as long as possible, and when he speaks it is in a very quiet tone.*]

Will. Going away?

Laura. [*Starts, rises and confronts him.*] Yes.

Will. In somewhat of a hurry, I should say.

Laura. Yes.

Will. What's the plan?

Laura. I'm just going, that's all.

Will. Madison been here?

Laura. He's just left.

Will. Of course you are going with him?

Laura. Yes.

Will. West?

Laura. To Nevada.

Will. Going—er—to get married?

Laura. This afternoon.

Will. So he didn't care then?

Laura. What do you mean when you say "He didn't care?"

Will. Of course you told him about the letter, and how it was burned up, and all that thing, didn't you?

Laura. Why, yes.

Will. And he said it didn't make any difference?

Laura. He—he didn't say anything. We're just going to be married, that's all.

Will. Did you mention my name and say that we'd been rather companionable for the last two months?

Laura. I told him you'd been a very good friend to me.

[*During this scene LAURA answers WILL with difficulty, and to a man of the world it is quite apparent that she is not telling the truth. WILL looks over toward her in an almost threatening way.*]

Will. How soon do you expect him back?

Laura. Quite soon. I don't know just exactly how long he'll be.

Will. And you mean to tell me that you kept your promise and told him the truth?

Laura. I—I. [*Then with defiance.*] What business have you got to ask me that? What business have you got to interfere anyway?

Will. [*Quietly.*] Then you've lied again. You lied to him and you just tried to lie to me now. I must say, Laura, that you're not particularly clever at it, although I don't doubt but that you've had considerable practice.

[*Gives her a searching look and slowly walks over to the chair at the table and sits down, still holding his hat in his hand and without removing his overcoat.*]

Laura. What are you going to do?

Will. Sit down here and rest a few moments; maybe longer.

Laura. You can't do that.

Will. I don't see why not. It's my own house.

Laura. But don't you see that he'll come back here soon and find you here?

Will. That's just exactly what I want him to do.

Laura. [*With suppressed emotion almost on the verge of hysteria.*] I've—I've never asked any favor of you, but I want to tell you this. If you do this you'll ruin my life. You've done enough to it already. Now I want you to go. You've got to go. I don't think you've got any right to come here now, in this way, and take this happiness from me. I've given you everything I've got, and now I want to live right and decent, and he wants me to, and we love each other. Now, Will Brockton, it's come to this. You've got to leave this place, do you hear? You've got to leave this place. Please get out.

Will. [*Rises and come to her.*] Do you think I'm going to let you interfere with my plans? Do you think I'm going to let a woman make a liar out of me? I'm going to stay right here. I like that boy, and I'm not going to let you put him to the bad.

Laura. I want you to go.

Will. And I tell you I won't go. I'm going to show you up just as you ought to be shown up. You've tried my patience just about as far as I can stand. I'm going to tell him the truth. It isn't you I care for, he's got to know.

Laura. [*Loses her temper and is almost tiger-like in her anger.*] You don't care for me? It isn't me you're thinking of? Who's the liar now? You are. You don't care for this man. All my life, since the day you first took me away, you've planned and planned and planned to keep me, and to trick me and bring me down with you. When you came to me I was happy. I didn't have much, just a little salary and some hard work. You say I'm bad, but who's made me so? Who took me out night after night? Who showed me what these luxuries were? Who put me in the habit of buying something I couldn't afford? Who got me in debt, and then, when I wouldn't do what you wanted me to, who had me discharged from the company so I had no means of living? Who followed me from

one place to another? Who, always entreating, tried to trap me into this life, and I didn't know any better? I knew it was wrong, yes, but you told me everybody in this business did that sort of thing, and I was just as good as anyone else. Finally you got me and you kept me. Then when I went away to Denver, and for the first time found a gleam of happiness, for the first time in my life——

Will. You're crazy.

Laura. I am crazy. You've made me crazy. You followed me to Denver, and then when I got back you bribed me again. You pulled me down, and you did the same old thing until this happened. Now I want you to get out, you understand. [*Goes over and pushes him.*] I want you to get out.

Will. Laura, you can't do this.

Laura. [*Screaming.*] No, you won't; you won't stay here. You're not going to do this thing again. I tell you I'm going to be happy. I tell you I'm going to be married.

[*She pushes him toward the door. He doesn't resist her very strongly. Her anger and her rage are entirely new to him. He is surprised and cannot understand.*]

You won't see him. I tell you you won't tell him. You've got no business to. I hate you. I've hated you for months. Now you've got to go—you've got to go—you've got to go.

Will. Laura, I tell you I'll stay.

[*Tries to speak, but he doesn't interrupt her. She's losing control of herself.*]

Laura. I want you to get out. I want you to get out. I hate you. I hate you.

Will. I'll come back.

Laura. I hate you. I hate you.

[*Shoves him out of door and slams it, and swaying on her feet, with her hand on the knob, as if afraid he would force his way in.*]

Get out. Get out. Get out!

[*As she stands almost screaming these words, ANNIE appears at the portieres and looks at her, and then the curtain falls.*]

ACT IV.

SCENE. *The same scene as Act III. It is about two o'clock in the afternoon.*

AT RISE. *When the curtain rises there are two big trunks and one small trunk up stage. These trunks are marked in the usual theatrical fashion, the small trunk is of the steamer type. There are grips packed, umbrellas and the usual paraphernalia that accompanies a woman when she is making a permanent departure from her place of living. Through the windows the snow can be seen falling. Seated on a trunk up L is LAURA, her hat and wraps are near her and she is evidently ready to leave at a moment's notice. ANNIE, rather disconsolate, is down R seated in a chair near the table and facing her mistress. LAURA is pale and perturbed.*

Annie. And ain't yuh goin' to let me come to yuh at all, Miss Laura?

Laura. I don't know yet, Annie. I don't even know what the place is like that we're going to. Mr. Madison hasn't said much. There hasn't been time.

Annie. Why Ah've done ma best for yuh, Miss Laura, yes Ah have. Ah just been with yer ev'ry moment of ma time, an' Ah worked for yer, an' Ah loved yuh, an' Ah doan wan' to be left 'ere all alone in this town 'ere in New York. Ah ain't the kind of colored lady knows many people. Can't yuh take me along wid yuh, Miss Laura, yuh all been so good to me.

Laura. Why I told you to stay here and get your things together, and then Mr. Brockton will probably want you to do something. Later I think he'll have you pack up just as soon as he finds I'm gone. I've got the address that you gave me. I'll let you know if you can come on.

Annie. [*Suddenly.*] Aint yer goin' to give me anything at all jes to remember yer by? Ah've been so honest——

Laura. Honest?

Annie. Yes'm, honest.

Laura. You've been about as honest as most colored girls are who work for women in the position that I am in. You haven't stolen enough to make me discharge you, but I've seen what you've taken. Don't try to fool me. What you've got you're welcome to, but for heaven's sake don't prate around here about loyalty and honestly, I'm sick of it.

Annie. Ain't yer goin' to give me no recommendation?

Laura. [*Impatiently looking around the room.*] What good would my recommendation do? You can always go and get another position with people who've lived the way I've lived, and my recom-

mentation to the other kind wouldn't amount to much. Now shut your noise. I don't want to hear any more. I've given you \$25 for a present. I think that's enough.

[ANNIE assumes a most aggrieved appearance. LAURA'S impatience increases. She glances at her watch and goes to the window and looks out.]

Laura. I wonder where John is. We'll never be able to make that train. [There is another interval in which her anxiety is made apparent, then the bell rings.] That must be he, Annie—go quick.

[ANNIE Xes and opens the door in the usual manner.]

Jim's voice outside. Is Miss Murdock in?

Annie. Yes, sir, she's in.

[LAURA is up C stage and turns to receive visitor. JIM enters. He is nicely dressed in black and has an appearance of prosperity about him, but in other respects he retains the old drollness of enunciation and manner. He Xes to LAURA in a cordial way and holds out his hand. ANNIE Xes, after closing the door, and exits through the portiers into the sleeping apartment.]

Jim. How-de-do, Miss Laura. Look like as if you were going to move?

Laura. Jim Weston, I'm mighty glad to see you. Yes, I am going to move, and a long ways, too. How well you're looking; as fit as a fiddle.

Jim. Yes. [Sitting on a trunk.] I am feelin' fine. Where yer goin'? Troupin'?

Laura. No, not exactly.

Jim. [Surveying the baggage.] Thought not. You'd have to be an A Number One star to carry all this junk along. I've heard about ye in the part you're playin', and I was kinder glad to see ye gettin' along so well. What's comin' off now?

Laura. [Very simply.] I'm going to be married this afternoon and then I'm going West.

Jim. [Leaving the trunk and walking toward her and holding out his hands.] Now I'm just glad to hear that. Ye know when I heard how—how things was breakin' for ye—well I aint knockin' or anythin' like that, but me and the missus have talked ye over a lot. I never did think this feller was goin' to do the right thing by yer. Brockton never looked to me like a feller would marry anybody, but now that he's goin' through just to make you a nice respectable wife' I guess everything must have happened for the best.

[LAURA doesn't answer, and after JIM has shaken her hand it falls listlessly to her side. She averts her

eyes.]

Jim. Y'see I wanted to thank you for what you did a couple of weeks ago. Burgess wrote me a letter and told me I could go ahead of one of his big shows if I waned to come back, and offering me considerable money. He mentioned your name, Miss Laura, and I talked it over with the missus and—well I can tell ye now, when I couldn't if ye weren't going to be hooked up—we decided that I wouldn't take that job, comin' as it did from you [*slowly*] and the way I knew it was framed up.

Laura. Why not?

Jim. [*Embarrassed.*] Well, ye see, there are three kids and they're all growing up, all of them in school, and the missus, she's just about forgot show business and she's playing a star part in the kitchen, juggling dishes and doing flip-flaps with pancakes, and we figgered that as we'd always gone along kinder clean like it wouldn't be good for the kids to take a job comin' from Brockton because you—you—well—you—

Laura. I know. You thought it wasn't decent. Is that it?

Jim. Oh, not exactly, only—well you see I'm gettin' along pretty good now. I got a little one night stand theatre out in Ohio—manager of it, too. The town is called Gallipolis. [*With a smile.*] Maybe you don't know much about Gallipolis or where it is.

Laura. No.

Jim. Well it looks just like it sounds. We got a little house, and the old lady is happy, and I feel so good that I can even stand her cookin'. Of course we aint makin' much money, but I guess I'm gettin' a little old fashioned around theatres anyway. The fellows from newspapers and colleges have got it on me. Last time I asked a man for a job he asked me if I knew anything about the Greek drama, and when I told him I didn't know the Greeks had a theatre in New York he slipped me a laugh and told me to come again on some rainy Tuesday. Then Gallipolis showed on the map, and I beat it for the West. [*JIM notices by this time the pain he has caused LAURA, and is embarrassed.*] Sorry if I hurt ye—didn't mean to, and now that yer goin' to be Mrs. Brockton, well I take back all I said, and while I don't think I want to change my position, I wouldn't turn it down for—for that other reason, that's all.

Laura. [*With a tone of defiance in her voice.*] But, Mr. Weston, I'm not going to be Mrs. Brockton.

Jim. No?

Laura. No.

Jim. Oh—Oh—

Laura. I'm going to marry another man, and it's going to be altogether different. I know what you meant when you said about the missus and the kids, and that's what I want—just a little home,

just a little peace, just a little comfort, and—and the man has come who's going to give it to me. You don't want me to say any more, do you?

Jim. [*Emphatically, and with a tone of hearty approval.*] No, I don't, and now I'm just going to put my mit out and shake yours and be real glad. I want to tell ye it's the only way to go along. I ain't never been a rival to Rockefeller, nor I ain't never made Harriman jealous, but since the day my old woman took her makeup off for the last time and walked out of that stage door to give me a little help and bring my kids into the world, I know that was the way to go along, and if you're goin' to take that road, by Jiminy, I'm glad of it, for you sure do deserve it. I wish yer luck.

Laura. Thank you.

Jim. I'm mighty glad you sidestepped Brockton. You're young, and you're pretty, and you're sweet, and if you've got the right kind of a feller there ain't no reason on earth why you shouldn't jest forgit the whole business and see nothin' but a lot of sunlight and laughs and good times comin' to ye. I'm mighty glad I come, and the old woman will be just tickled to death. She just feels as if she knew you after I told her about them hard times we had at Farley's boarding house, so I feel that it's paid me to come to New York, even if I don't get the business I was looking at. [*Goes over to her.*] Now I'm goin'. Don't forget Gallipolis's the name and sometimes the mail does get there. I'd be awful glad if you wrote the missus a little note tellin' us how you're gettin' along, and if you ever have to ride on the Wheeling & Lake Erie just look out of the window when the train passes our town, because few do stop there. and make up your mind that the Weston household is with you forty ways from the Jack day and night. Good-bye and God bless you.

Laura. Good-bye, Jim. I'm so glad to know you're happy, for it is good to be happy.

Jim. You bet.

[*Moves toward the door. She follows him after they have shaken hands.*]

Jim. Never mind, I can get out all right. [*Opens the door and at the door.*] Gool-bye again.

Laura. [*Very softly.*] Good-bye. [*He exits and closes the door. She stands motionless until she hears the outer door slam, then she sinks into chair in deep thought*] I wonder why he doesn't come. [*She goes up and looks out of the window and turns down stage, mechanically goes up stage again, inspects all the trunks and baggage, walks down stage and sits in a chair, her apprehension and nervousness increasing every moment. She goes up to the portieres and opens them a little.*] Annie, are you getting the things together?

Annie's Voice. Yes'm I'm mos' packed.

[*Laura returns to the window and looks out. The bell rings.*]

Laura. Hurry, Annie, and see who that is.

[*ANNIE enters, Xes, opens door, exits, opens the outer door.*]

Annie's Voice. She's waitin' for yer, Mr. Madison.

[*LAURA hurries down to the C of stage. JOHN enters, hat in hand and his overcoat on, followed by ANNIE. He stops just as he enters and looks at Laura long and searchingly. LAURA instinctively feels that something has happened. She shudders and remains firm. ANNIE Xes and exits.*]

Laura. [*With a little effort.*] Aren't you a little late, dear?

John. I—I was detained down town a few minutes. I think that we can probably carry out our plan all right.

Laura. [*After a pause.*] Has anything happened?

JOHN. I've made all the arrangements. The men will be here in a few minutes for your trunks. I've got the railroad tickets and the license. You didn't have to be there with me. One of my friends arranged that, but——

Laura. But what, John?

[*He goes over to her, holds out both hands into which she limply places hers. She intuitively understands that she is about to go through an ordeal. She seems to feel that JOHN has been acquainted with some fact which might interfere with their plan. He looks at her long and searchingly. He, too, evidently is much wrought up, but when he speaks to her it is with a calm dignity and force which so truly shows the character of the man.*]

John. Laura.

Laura. Yes?

John. You know when I went down town I said I was going to call on two or three of my friends in Park Row who used to work with me on Western newspapers and who came to New York.

Laura. I know.

John. I told them what I came East for and my good luck and all that sort of thing, and who I was going to marry.

Laura. Well?

John. It's pretty tough for me to go through this, Laura, but I've got to do it. They said something about you and Brockton, and when I tried to force something out of them I found that they'd said too much but not quite enough.

Laura. What did they say?

John. Just that—too much and not quite enough. One of the boys down there has gone through a lot with me. He was too much of a man to talk a lot, and he knew I wouldn't stand for a great deal. Now we're packed up, and I've got the tickets, and there's a minister over here on Madison Avenue waiting for us. We can get to Chicago to-morrow morning if we go, and the Overland Limited can get us out of there to-morrow afternoon. You see then you'll be my wife. That's pretty serious business, Laura, and all I want now from you is the truth.

Laura. Well?

John. Just tell me that what they said, or rather intimated, was just an echo of the past—that it came from what had been going on before that wonderful day out in Colorado when we made our agreement. I don't want their word, Laura, I just want yours. We've got to be together all the rest of our lives, and the only way we can end right is to start right, and the only way to start right is to tell the truth. Just say to me that all this gossip is ancient history and don't cut any figures with the things that have happened since you left Denver. [*She is silent and almost ready to break down.*] Dear, I don't want to hurt you. Tell me that you've been on the level, for *I've* been just as true as a man can be, and that's the God's honest fact.

[*LAURA summons all her courage, looks up into his loving eyes, shrings a moment before his anxious face and speaks as simply as she can.*]

Laura. Yes, John, I have been on the level, and all that you've heard was just an echo.

John. [*Very tenderly.*] I knew that, dear, I knew it. [*He takes her in his arms and kisses her. She clings to him in pitiful helplessness. His manner is changed to one of almost boyish happiness.*] Well now everything's all ready let's get on the job. We haven't a whole lot of time. Laura, you've got trunks enough, haven't you? One might think we're moving a whole colony. [*Turns to her with a smile.*] And, by the way, to me you are a whole colony—anyway you're the only one I ever wanted to settle in.

Laura. When do we go?

John. Right away. I've arranged to have the stuff taken over. If we can't check it on this train why it will go through some way. The great idea is to get away. Get your duds on.

Laura. All right.

[*JOHN goes down to the L of stage, where a chair is, while LAURA starts for her hat and coat toward the portieres. JOHN takes out of a side coat pocket the marriage license, and with a smile commences to look it over. Just as LAURA is about to reach the portieres the*

outer door slams. She stops dead still and JOHN looks up at her. Her back is to the stage. A latch key is heard in the door. It opens slowly and WILL enters with coat and hat on. LAURA turns around and faces him. He comes in leisurely, paying no attention to anyone. JOHN rises and becomes as rigid as a statue. WILL leisurely walks across the stage and afterwards into the rooms through the portieres. There is a wait for a second. No one moves. WILL re-enters with his coat and hat off and goes down to R of stage opposite JOHN, sits in a chair, crosses his legs, smiles at the young man.]

Will. Hello, Madison, when did you get in?

[Slowly JOHN seems to recover himself. His right hand starts up toward the lapel of his coat and slowly he pulls his Colt revolver from the holster under his armpit. There is a deadly determination and deliberation in every movement that he makes. WILL jumps to his feet and looks at him. The revolver is slowly uplifted in the air, as a Western man handles a gun, so that when it is snapped down with a jerk the deadly shot can be fired. LAURA is terror-stricken, but before the shot is fired she takes a step forward and extends one hand in a gesture of entreaty.]

Laura. [In a husky voice that is almost a whisper.] Don't shoot. [The gun remains uplifted for a moment. JOHN is evidently wavering in his determination to kill, and slowly his whole frame relaxes. He lowers the pistol in his hand in a manner which clearly indicates that he is not going to shoot. He quietly puts it back in the holster and WILL is obviously relieved, although he stood his ground like a man.]

John. [Slowly and in a low tone.] You said that just in time. Thank you.

[A pause.]

Will. [Recovering and in a light tone.] Well, you see, Madison, that what I said when I was——

John. [Threateningly.] Look out, Brockton, I don't want to talk to you. [The men confront.]

Will. All right.

John. [To LAURA.] Now get that man out of here.

Laura. John, I——

John. Get him out. Get him out before I lose my temper and go to pieces or they'll take him out without his help.

Laura. [To WILL.] Go—go. Please go.

Will. [*Deliberately.*] If that's the way you want it I'm willing.

[*He exits into the sleeping apartment. LAURA and JOHN stand facing each other. He enters again with hat and coat in hand and passes over toward the door. LAURA and JOHN do not move. When he gets just a little to the L of the C of the stage LAURA steps forward and speaks in a low tone and with great stress of feeling.*]

Laura. Now before you go, and to you both, now I want to tell you how—how I've learned to despise him. John, I know you don't believe me, but it's true—it's true. I don't love anyone in the world but just you. You're the only decent man who ever came into my life. I know you don't think that it can be explained—maybe there isn't any explanation. I couldn't help it, he forced himself upon me. I was so poor, and you were so poor, and I had to live, and he wouldn't let me work, and he's only let me live one way, and I was hungry. Do you know what that means? I was hungry and didn't have clothes to wear, and I tried, Oh, John, I tried so hard to do the other thing—the right thing—but I couldn't. They drove me. I don't want you to go now. I don't want you to believe that even for a single, little moment you weren't the only say one thing. I love you, and you're the only one I ever have loved.

John. I—I knew I didn't help much, and perhaps I could have forgiven you if you hadn't lied to me. That's what hurt. [*Turning to WILL.*] I expected you to lie, you're that kind of a man. You left me with a shake of the hand and you gave me your word, and you didn't keep it. Why should you keep it? Why should anything make any difference with you? You live here making war on unfortunate women, beating them down, buying and selling them. Every move and every word you speak is a lie. I don't know where the responsibility of this thing lies, I only know what you've done. You keep your word, you know what a promise means, why, you pup, you've no right to live in the same world with decent folks. Now you make yourself scarce, or take it from me, I'll just kill you, that's all.

Will. Don't you talk to me that way.

John. You'd better leave.

Will. I'll leave, Madison, but I'm not going to let you think that I didn't do the right thing with you. When this business came off she came to me voluntarily. She said she wanted to come back. I told you that when I was in Colorado. I told you she couldn't stand the game, and you didn't believe me, and I told you that when she did this sort of thing I'd let you know. I dictated a letter to her to send to you, and I told you the truth in as few words as possible. I left it sealed and stamped in her hands to mail. She didn't mail it. If there's been a lie she told it. I didn't.

John. *[With a quiet appeal in his voice.]* Laura!

[She hangs her head and averts her eyes.]

Will. You see. Why, my boy, whatever you think of me or the life I lead, no matter how different it is from you, I wouldn't have had this come to you for anything in the world. *[JOHN makes an impatient gesture.]* No, I wouldn't. My women don't mean a whole lot to me because I don't take them seriously. I wish I had the faith and the youth to feel the way you do. You're all in and broken up, but I wish I could be broken up just once. I thought I was on the level. I did what I thought was best for you, because I didn't think she could ever go through the way you wanted her to. I'm sorry it's all turned out bad. Good-bye.

[He looks at JOHN for a moment as if he was going to speak. JOHN stands absolutely rigid. The blow has hit him harder than he thought. WILL exits. The first door closes. In a moment the second door is slammed. JOHN and LAURA look at each other for a moment. He gives her no chance to speak. The hurt in his heart and his accusation are shown by his broken manner. A great grief has stolen into his life and he doesn't quite understand it. He seems to be feeling around for something to say, some way to get out. His head turns toward the door. With a pitiful gesture of the hand he looks at her in all his sorrow.]

John. Well?

Laura. John, I—

John. I'd be careful what I said. Don't try to make excuses. I understand.

Laura. It's not excuses. I want to tell you what's in my heart, but I can't, it won't speak and you don't believe my voice.

John. You'd better leave it unsaid.

Laura. *[Slowly going down and sitting in a chair at the table opposite JOHN, looking at him.]* But I must tell you. I can't let you go like this. *[She goes over to him and makes a weak attempt to put her arms around him. He takes her arms and puts them back to her side.]* I love you. I—how can I tell you—but I do, I do, and you won't believe me.

[He remains silent for a moment and then takes her by the hand, leads her over to the chair and places her in it.]

John. I think you do as far as you are able, but, Laura, I'm afraid you don't know what a decent sentiment is. *[He looks away from her a few paces, gathers himself together, takes another chair, moves it toward her, places it back so that it faces her, and then sits astride of it. His tone is very gentle and very firm, but it carries a*

tremendous conviction, even with his grief ringing through his speech.] If ever I was in need of a word I am now. I don't know how to say what I want to say, and it's the first time in my life that I've been placed just this way. Laura, you're not immoral, you're just unmoral, and there isn't a particle of hope for you. When we met neither of us had any reason to be proud, but I thought that you thought that it was the chance of salvation which sometimes comes to a man and a woman when they do meet that way, and we loved—I did—wholly, truly, decently. What had been, had been. It was all in the great to-be. for us, and now, now how you've kept your word. What little that promise meant that you gave me out in Colorado when I thought you handed me a new lease of life.

Laura. [In a voice that is changed and metallic. She is literally being nailed to the cross.] You're killing me—killing me.

John. No, don't make such a mistake. In a month you'll recover. There will be days when, over a cocktail glass with a lot of folks around, having a good time, that you'll look out across its rim and see me as I was that day when we came together, and you'll shudder just for a moment, and take another drink, and then it'll be all over. Why, Laura, you're as shallow as a sun-dried gulch in the desert. With you it is always the easy way—expediency is your god and you'll worship it until the end. You'll go on and on until you are finally left a wreck, physically and every other way. Just the type of the common women. You'll never make a fight. The wrong way is the easy way. It's your way and always has been—always will be. I pity you, pity you from the bottom of my heart. If you ever had a chance it was with me. You've thrown that away and you'll go down, down, down, until you've reached the very bedrock of depravity.

Laura. [Still in the same metallic tone of voice.] You'll never leave me to do that. I'll kill myself.

John. Perhaps that's the only thing left for you to do. Perhaps, after all, that's the only hope, but you'll not do it. It's easier to live.

[He rises and takes a step toward his hat and coat, LAURA rising at the same time.]

Laura. John, I said I'd kill myself and I mean it. If it's the only thing to do I'll do it, and I'll do it before your very eyes.

[She crosses quickly to the desk and takes a pistol from the drawer. JOHN looks at her a moment with the saddest sort of a smile flitting across his face. He goes to the chair where his coat and hat are, puts his coat over his arm, takes his hat in his hand and starts to the door.]

Laura. [Waiting a moment.] You understand that when you put your hand on that door I'm going to shoot myself. I will, so help me God.

John. [*Stops and looks at her.*] Women sometimes work themselves into a fit of hysteria and act foolishly. If they had a moment's thought it might be different; but if you think you ought to kill yourself, and you want to do it in front of me, I don't see why you shouldn't have the chance. [*Raising his voice.*] Annie, Annie!

Annie. [*Her voice off stage.*] Yes, sir.

John. Come here. [*ANNIE appears at the portieres. LAURA looks at JOHN in bewilderment.*] You see your mistress there has a pistol in her hand?

Annie. [*Frightened.*] Yes, sir.

John. She wants to kill herself. I just called you to witness that the act is entirely voluntary on her part. That it is neither desired or suggested by me. Now, Laura, go ahead.

Laura. [*Nearly collapsing, drops the pistol to the floor.*] John, I—can't—

John. Annie, she's changed her mind. You can go.

Annie. But, Miss Laura, I—

John. [*Peremptorily.*] You can go. [*Bewildered and not understanding, ANNIE exits through the portieres. In that same gentle tone, but carrying with it an almost frigid conviction.*] You didn't have the nerve. I knew you wouldn't. You never squarely faced a situation or a difficulty in your life, and you never will. It's the same old story of evasion. No matter what the cost, just for a moment you thought the only decent thing for you to do was to die. You were quite sure of that, and yet you couldn't go through. I am sorry for you, more sorry than I can tell.

[*He takes a step towards the door.*]

Laura. You're going—you're going?

John. Yes.

Laura. And—and—you never thought that perhaps I'm frail, and weak, and a woman, and that now, maybe, I need your strength, and you might give it to me, and it might be better. I want to lean on you, John. I know I need some one. Aren't you going to let me?

John. I gave you your chance, Laura, but you leaned the wrong way. Good-bye. I—I hope you'll get on all right. [*Exit.*]

Laura. John—John—I—

[*She stands listless for a moment, then turns and walks two or three steps right down stage, again turns toward the door and her eye catches the pistol on the floor. She goes over toward it fearful and hesitatingly, picks it up, looks at it, and then very quickly walks over to the desk, throws it into the drawer, and shuts it quickly. She walks back towards the table, and as she passes she sees her reflection in the mirror. Her*

hair has become somewhat disheveled, and the instinct of the woman of this type immediately gains hold of her and she stops and adjusts it. Then she goes down to the chair at the L of the table and sits down. ANNIE appears through the portieres.]

Annie. Miss Laura, ain't you goin' away?

LAURA. [Suddenly arousing herself, and with a defiant voice.] No, I'm not. I'm going to stay right here. Open these trunks, take out those clothes, get me my prettiest dress. Hurry up. [She goes before the mirror.] Get my new hat, dress up my body and paint up my face. It's all they've left of me. [To herself.] They've taken my soul away with them.

Annie. [In a happy voice.] Yes'm, yes'm.

Laura. [Who is arranging her hair.] Doll me up, Annie.

Annie. You goin' out, Miss Laura?

Laura. Yes. I'm going to Rector's to make a hit and to hell with the rest.

Annie. [Who is by this time working frantically at the trunks.] That's the way, Miss Laura—men ain't no good nohow! [LAURA'S nerve suddenly fails her again, she staggers a little, she steps back and sinks in a chair next the table. Her hands are clasped between her knees, her body is bent forward, her eyes are glassy, and the grief is wringing her heart. ANNIE in the meantime is busy at her work, she has opened a trunk and laid out a handsome gown, evidently perfectly contented, and is singing in a low voice "Bon Bon Buddie, the Chocolate Drop." The melody reaches LAURA'S ears; she shudders.]

Laura. Oh, God! Oh, my God!

CURTAIN.



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